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AUTOGRAPH EDITION

THE WORKS OF

ANATOLE FRANCE

VOLUME II

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ANATOLE FRANCE

THAÏS

A TRANSLATION BY

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CRAINQUEBILLE
AND OTHER STORIES

A TRANSLATION BY

WINIFRED STEPHENS

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PART THE FIRST

THE LOTUS

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THE LOTUS

N those days there were many hermits living in the desert. On both banks of the Nile numerous huts, built by these solitary dwellers, of branches held together by clay, were scattered at a little distance from each other, so that the inhabitants could live alone, and yet help one another in case of need. Churches, each surmounted by a cross, stood here and there amongst the huts, and the monks flocked to them at each festival to celebrate the services or to partake of the Communion. There were also, here and there on the banks of the river, monasteries, where the cenobites lived in separate cells, and only met together that they might the better enjoy their solitude.

Both hermits and cenobites led abstemious lives, taking no food till after sunset, and eating nothing but bread with a little salt and hyssop. Some retired into the desert, and led a still more strange life in some cave or tomb.

All lived in temperance and chastity; they wore a hair shirt and a hood, slept on the bare ground after long watching, prayed, sang psalms, and, in

short, spent their days in works of penitence. As an atonement for original sin, they refused their body not only all pleasures and satisfactions, but even that care and attention which in this age are deemed indispensable. They believed that the diseases of our members purify our souls, and the flesh could put on no adornment more glorious than wounds and ulcers. Thus, they thought they fulfilled the words of the prophet, "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

Amongst the inhabitants of the holy Thebaid, there were some who passed their days in asceticism and contemplation; others gained their livelihood by plaiting palm fibre, or by working at harvest-time for the neighbouring farmers. The Gentiles wrongly suspected some of them of living by brigandage, and allying themselves to the nomadic Arabs who robbed the caravans. But, as a matter of fact, the monks despised riches, and the odour of their sanctity rose to heaven.

Angels in the likeness of young men, came, staff in hand, as travellers, to visit the hermitages; whilst demons—having assumed the form of Ethiopians or of animals—wandered round the habitations of the hermits in order to lead them into temptation. When the monks went in the morning to fill their pitcher at the spring, they saw the footprints of

Satyrs and Aigipans in the sand. The Thebaid was, really and spiritually, a battlefield, where, at all times, and more especially at night, there were terrible conflicts between heaven and hell.

The ascetics, furiously assailed by legions of the damned, defended themselves—with the help of God and the angels—by fasting, prayer, and penance. Sometimes carnal desires pricked them so cruelly that they cried aloud with pain, and their lamentations rose to the starlit heavens mingled with the howls of the hungry hyænas. Then it was that the demons appeared in delightful forms. For though the demons are, in reality, hideous, they sometimes assume an appearance of beauty which prevents their real nature from being recognised. The ascetics of the Thebaid were amazed to see in their cells phantasms of delights unknown even to the voluptuaries of the age. But, as they were under the sign of the Cross, they did not succumb to these temptations, and the unclean spirits, assuming again their true character, fled at daybreak, filled with rage and shame. It was not unusual to meet at dawn one of these beings, flying away and weeping, and replying to those who questioned it, "I weep and groan because one of the Christians who live here has beaten me with rods, and driven me away in ignominy."

The power of the old saints of the desert extended over all sinners and unbelievers. Their goodness was sometimes terrible. They derived from the Apostles authority to punish all offences against the true and only God, and no earthly power could save those they condemned. Strange tales were told in the cities, and even as far as Alexandria, how the earth had opened and swallowed up certain wicked persons whom one of these saints struck with his staff. Therefore they were feared by all evil-doers, and particularly by mimes, mountebanks, married priests, and prostitutes.

Such was the sanctity of these holy men that even wild beasts felt their power. When a hermit was about to die, a lion came and dug a grave with its claws. The saint knew by this that God had called him, and he went and kissed all his brethren on the cheek. Then he lay down joyfully, and slept in the Lord.

Now that Anthony, who was more than a hundred years old, had retired to Mount Colzin with his well-beloved disciples, Macarius and Amathas, there was no monk in the Thebaid more renowned for good works than Paphnutius, the Abbot of Antinoë. Ephrem and Serapion had a greater number of followers, and in the spiritual and temporal management of their monasteries surpassed him. But

Paphnutius observed the most rigorous fasts, and often went for three entire days without taking food. He wore a very rough hair shirt, he flogged himself night and morning, and lay for hours with his face to the earth.

His twenty-four disciples had built their huts near his, and imitated his austerities. He loved them all dearly in Jesus Christ, and unceasingly exhorted them to good works. Amongst his spiritual children were men who had been robbers for many years, and had been persuaded by the exhortations of the holy abbot to embrace the monastic life, and who now edified their companions by the purity of their lives. One, who had been cook to the Queen of Abyssinia, and was converted by the Abbot of Antinoë, never ceased to weep. There was also Flavian, the deacon, who knew the Scriptures, and spoke well; but the disciple of Paphnutius who surpassed all the others in holiness was a young peasant named Paul, and surnamed the Fool, because of his extreme simplicity. Men laughed at his childishness, but God favoured him with visions, and by bestowing upon him the gift of prophecy.

Paphnutius passed his life in teaching his disciples, and in ascetic practices. Often did he meditate upon the Holy Scriptures in order to find allegories in them. Therefore he abounded in good works,

though still young. The devils, who so rudely assailed the good hermits, did not dare to approach him. At night, seven little jackals sat in the moonlight in front of his cell, silent and motionless, and with their ears pricked up. It was believed that they were seven devils, who, owing to his sanctity, could not cross his threshold.

Paphnutius was born at Alexandria of noble parents, who had instructed him in all profane learning. He had even been allured by the falsehoods of the poets, and in his early youth had been misguided enough to believe that the human race had all been drowned by a deluge in the days of Deucalion, and had argued with his fellow-scholars concerning the nature, the attributes, and even the existence of God. He then led a life of dissipation, after the manner of the Gentiles, and he recalled the memory of those days with shame and horror.

"At that time," he used to say to the brethren, "I seethed in the cauldron of false delights."

He meant by that that he had eaten food properly dressed, and frequented the public baths. In fact, until his twentieth year he had continued to lead the ordinary existence of those times, which now seemed to him rather death than life; but, owing to the lessons of the priest Macrinus, he then became a new man.

The truth penetrated him through and through, and—as he used to say—entered his soul like a sword. He embraced the faith of Calvary, and worshipped Christ crucified. After his baptism he remained yet a year amongst the Gentiles, unable to cast off the bonds of old habits. But one day he entered a church, and heard a deacon read from the Bible, the verse, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." Thereupon he sold all that he had, gave away the money in alms, and embraced the monastic life.

During the ten years that he had lived remote from men, he no longer seethed in the cauldron of false delights, but more profitably macerated his flesh in the balms of penitence.

One day when, according to his pious custom, he was recalling to mind the hours he had lived apart from God, and examining his sins one by one, that he might the better ponder on their enormity, he remembered that he had seen at the theatre at Alexandria a very beautiful actress named Thaïs. This woman showed herself in the public games, and did not scruple to perform dances, the movements of which, arranged only too cleverly, brought to mind the most horrible passions. Sometimes she imitated the horrible deeds which the Pagan fables ascribe to Venus, Leda, or Pasiphaë. Thus she fired

all the spectators with lust, and when handsome young men, or rich old ones, came, inspired with love, to hang wreaths of flowers round her door, she welcomed them, and gave herself up to them. So that, whilst she lost her own soul, she also ruined the souls of many others.

She had almost led Paphnutius himself into the sins of the flesh. She had awakened desire in him, and he had once approached the house of Thaïs. But he stopped on the threshold of the courtesan's house, partly restrained by the natural timidity of extreme youth—he was then but fifteen years old—and partly by the fear of being refused on account of his want of money, for his parents took care that he should commit no great extravagances.

God, in His mercy, had used these two means to prevent him from committing a great sin. But Paphnutius had not been grateful to Him for that, because at that time he was blind to his own interests, and did not know that he was lusting after false delights. Now, kneeling in his cell, before the image of that holy cross on which hung, as in a balance, the ransom of the world, Paphnutius began to think of Thaïs, because Thaïs was a sin to him, and he meditated long, according to ascetic rules, on the fearful hideousness of the carnal delights with which this woman had inspired him in the days of his

sin and ignorance. After some hours of meditation the image of Thaïs appeared to him clearly and distinctly. He saw her again, as he had seen her when she tempted him, in all the beauty of the flesh. At first she showed herself like a Leda, softly lying upon a bed of hyacinths, her head bowed, her eyes humid and filled with a strange light, her nostrils quivering, her mouth half open, her breasts like two flowers, and her arms smooth and fresh as two brooks. At this sight Paphnutius struck his breast and said—

"I call Thee to witness, my God, that I have considered how heinous has been my sin."

Gradually the face of the image changed its expression. Little by little the lips of Thaïs, by lowering at the corners of the mouth, expressed a mysterious suffering. Her large eyes were filled with tears and lights; her breast heaved with sighs, like the sighing of a wind that precedes a tempest. At this sight Paphnutius was troubled to the bottom of his soul. Prostrating himself on the floor, he uttered this prayer—

"Thou who hast put pity in our hearts, like the morning dew upon the fields, O just and merciful God, be Thou blessed! Praise! praise be unto Thee! Put away from Thy servant that false tenderness which tempts to concupiscence, and grant

that I may only love Thy creatures in Thee, for they pass away, but Thou endurest for ever. If I care for this woman, it is only because she is Thy handiwork. The angels themselves feel pity for her. Is she not, O Lord, the breath of Thy mouth? Let her not continue to sin with many citizens and strangers. There is great pity for her in my heart. Her wickednesses are abominable, and but to think of them makes my flesh creep. But the more wicked she is, the more do I lament for her. I weep when I think that the devils will torment her to all eternity."

As he was meditating in this way, he saw a little jackal lying at his feet. He felt much surprised, for the door of his cell had been closed since the morning. The animal seemed to read the Abbot's thoughts, and wagged its tail like a dog. Paphnutius made the sign of the cross and the beast vanished. He knew then that, for the first time, the devil had entered his cell, and he uttered a short prayer; then he thought again about Thaïs.

"With God's help," he said to himself, "I must save her." And he slept.

The next morning, when he had said his prayers, he went to see the sainted Palemon, a holy hermit who lived some distance away. He found him smiling quietly as he dug the ground, as was his custom.

Palemon was an old man, and cultivated a little garden; the wild beasts came and licked his hands, and the devils never tormented him.

"May God be praised, brother Paphnutius," he said, as he leaned upon his spade.

"God be praised!" replied Paphnutius. "And peace be unto my brother."

"The like peace be unto thee, brother Paphnutius," said Palemon; and he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve.

"Brother Palemon, all our discourse ought to be solely the praise of Him who has promised to be wheresoever two or three are gathered together in His Name. That is why I come to you concerning a design I have formed to glorify the Lord."

"May the Lord bless thy design, Paphnutius, as He has blessed my lettuces. Every morning He spreads His grace with the dew on my garden, and His goodness causes me to glorify Him in the cucumbers and melons which He gives me. Let us pray that He may keep us in His peace. For nothing is more to be feared than those unruly passions which trouble our hearts. When these passions disturb us we are like drunken men, and we stagger from right to left unceasingly, and are like to fall miserably. Sometimes these passions plunge us into a turbulent joy, and he who gives way to such,

sullies the air with brutish laughter. Such false joy drags the sinner into all sorts of excess. But sometimes also the troubles of the soul and of the senses throw us into an impious sadness which is a thousand times worse than the joy. Brother Paphnutius, I am but a miserable sinner, but I have found, in my long life, that the cenobite has no foe worse than sadness. I mean by that the obstinate melancholy which envelopes the soul as in a mist, and hides from us the light of God. Nothing is more contrary to salvation, and the devil's greatest triumph is to sow black and bitter thoughts in the heart of a good man. If he sent us only pleasurable temptations, he would not be half so much to be feared. Alas! he excels in making us sad. Did he not show to our father Anthony a black child of such surpassing beauty that the very sight of it drew tears? With God's help, our father Anthony avoided the snares of the demon. I knew him when he lived amongst us; he was cheerful with his disciples, and never gave way to melancholy. But did you not come, my brother, to talk to me of a design you had formed in your mind? Let me know what it is—if, at least, this design has for its object the glory of God."

"Brother Palemon, what I propose is really to the glory of God. Strengthen me with your counsel,

for you know many things, and sin has never darkened the clearness of your mind."

"Brother Paphnutius, I am not worthy to unloose the latchet of thy sandals, and my sins are as countless as the sands of the desert. But I am old, and I will never refuse the help of my experience."

"I will confide in you, then, brother Palemon, that I am stricken with grief at the thought that there is, in Alexandria, a courtesan named Thaïs, who lives in sin, and a subject of reproach unto the people."

"Brother Paphnutius, that is, in truth, an abomination which we do well to deplore. There are many women amongst the Gentiles who lead lives of that kind. Have you thought of any remedy for this great evil?"

"Brother Palemon, I will go to Alexandria and find this woman, and, with God's help, I will convert her; that is my intention; do you approve of it, brother?"

"Brother Paphnutius, I am but a miserable sinner, but our father Anthony used to say, 'In whatsoever place thou art, hasten not to leave it to go elsewhere.' "

"Brother Palemon, do you disapprove of my project?"

"Dear Paphnutius, God forbid that I should sus-

pect my brother of bad intentions. But our father Anthony also said, 'Fishes die on dry land, and so is it with those monks who leave their cells and mingle with the men of this world, amongst whom no good thing is to be found.' "

Having thus spoken, the old man pressed his foot on the spade, and began to dig energetically round a fig tree laden with fruit. As he was thus engaged, there was a rustling in the bushes, and an antelope leaped over the hedge which surrounded the garden; it stopped, surprised and frightened, its delicate legs trembling, then ran up to the old man, and laid its pretty head on the breast of its friend.

"God be praised in the gazelle of the desert," said Palemon.

He went to his hut, the light-footed little animal trotting after him, and brought out some black bread, which the antelope ate out of his hand.

Paphnutius remained thoughtful for some time, his eyes fixed upon the stones at his feet. Then he slowly walked back to his cell, pondering on what he had heard. A great struggle was going on in his mind.

"The hermit gives good advice," he said to himself; "the spirit of prudence is in him. And he doubts the wisdom of my intention. Yet it would be cruel to leave Thaïs any longer in the power of

the demon who possesses her. May God advise and conduct me."

As he was walking along, he saw a plover, caught in the net that a hunter had laid on the sand, and he knew that it was a hen bird, for he saw the male fly to the net, and tear the meshes one by one with its beak, until it had made an opening by which its mate could escape. The holy man watched this incident, and as, by virtue of his holiness, he easily comprehended the mystic sense of all occurrences, he knew that the captive bird was no other than Thaïs, caught in the snares of sin, and that—like the plover that had cut the hempen threads with its beak—he could, by pronouncing the word of power, break the invisible bonds by which Thaïs was held in sin. Therefore he praised God, and was confirmed in his first resolution. But then seeing the plover caught by the feet, and hampered by the net it had broken, he fell into uncertainty again.

He did not sleep all night, and before dawn he had a vision. Thaïs appeared to him again. There was no expression of guilty pleasure on her face, nor was she dressed according to custom in transparent drapery. She was enveloped in a shroud, which hid even a part of her face, so that the Abbot could see nothing but the two eyes, from which flowed white and heavy tears.

At this sight he began to weep, and believing that this vision came from God, he no longer hesitated. He rose, seized a knotted stick, the symbol of the Christian faith, and left his cell, carefully closing the door, lest the animals of the desert and the birds of the air should enter, and befoul the copy of the Holy Scriptures which stood at the head of his bed. He called Flavian, the deacon, and gave him authority over the other twenty-three disciples during his absence; and then, clad only in a long cassock, he bent his steps towards the Nile, intending to follow the Libyan bank to the city founded by the Macedonian monarch. He walked from dawn to eve, indifferent to fatigue, hunger, and thirst; the sun was already low on the horizon when he saw the dreadful river, the blood-red waters of which rolled between the rocks of gold and fire.

He kept along the shore, begging his bread at the door of solitary huts for the love of God, and joyfully receiving insults, refusals, or threats. He feared neither robbers nor wild beasts, but he took great care to avoid all the towns and villages he came near. He was afraid lest he should see children playing at knuckle-bones before their father's house, or meet, by the side of the well, women in blue smocks, who might put down their pitcher and smile at him. All things are dangerous

for the hermit; it is sometimes a danger for him to read in the Scriptures that the Divine Master journeyed from town to town and supped with His disciples. The virtues that the anchorites embroider so carefully on the tissue of faith, are as fragile as they are beautiful; a breath of ordinary life may tarnish their pleasant colours. For that reason, Paphnutius avoided the towns, fearing lest his heart should soften at the sight of his fellow-men.

He journeyed along lonely roads. When evening came, the murmuring of the breeze amidst the tamarisk trees made him shiver, and he pulled his hood over his eyes that he might not see how beautiful all things were. After walking six days, he came to a place called Silsile. There the river runs in a narrow valley, bordered by a double chain of granite mountains. It was there that the Egyptians, in the days when they worshipped demons, carved their idols. Paphnutius saw an enormous sphinx carved in the solid rock. Fearing that it might still possess some diabolical properties, he made the sign of the cross, and pronounced the name of Jesus; he immediately saw a bat fly out of one of the monster's ears, and Paphnutius knew that he had driven out the evil spirits which had been for centuries in the figure. His zeal increased, and pick-

ing up a large stone, he threw it in the idol's face. Then the mysterious face of the sphinx expressed such profound sadness that Paphnutius was moved. In fact, the expression of superhuman grief on the stone visage would have touched even the most unfeeling man. Therefore Paphnutius said to the sphinx—

"O monster, be like the satyrs and centaurs our father Anthony saw in the desert, and confess the divinity of Jesus Christ, and I will bless thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

When he had spoken a rosy light gleamed in the eyes of the sphinx; the heavy eyelids of the monster quivered and the granite lips painfully murmured, as though in echo to the man's voice, the holy name of Jesus Christ; therefore Paphnutius stretched out his right hand, and blessed the sphinx of Silsile.

That being done, he resumed his journey, and the valley having grown wider, he saw the ruins of an immense city. The temples, which still remained standing, were supported by idols which served as columns, and—by the permission of God—these figures with women's heads and cow's horns, threw on Paphnutius a long look which made him turn pale. He walked thus seventeen days, his only food a few raw herbs, and he slept at night in some ruined palace, amongst the wild cats and Pharaoh's

rats, with which mingled sometimes, women whose bodies ended in a scaly tail. But Paphnutius knew that these women came from hell, and he drove them away by making the sign of the cross.

On the eighteenth day, he found, far from any village, a wretched hut made of palm leaves, and half buried under the sand which had been driven by the desert wind. He approached it, hoping that the hut was inhabited by some pious anchorite. He saw inside the hovel—for there was no door—a pitcher, a bunch of onions, and a bed of dried leaves.

"This must be the habitation of a hermit," he said to himself. "Hermits are generally to be found near their hut, and I shall not fail to meet this one. I will give him the kiss of peace, even as the holy Anthony did when he came to the hermit Paul, and kissed him three times. We will discourse of things eternal, and perhaps our Lord will send us, by one of His ravens, a crust of bread, which my host will willingly invite me to share with him."

Whilst he was thus speaking to himself, he walked round the hut to see if he could find any one. He had not walked a hundred paces when he saw a man seated, with his legs crossed, by the side of the river. The man was naked; his hair and beard

were quite white, and his body redder than brick. Paphnutius felt sure this must be the hermit. He saluted him with the words the monks are accustomed to use when they meet each other.

"Peace be with you, brother! May you some day taste the sweet joys of paradise."

The man did not reply. He remained motionless, and appeared not to have heard. Paphnutius supposed this was due to one of those rhapsodies to which the saints are accustomed. He knelt down, with his hands joined, by the side of the unknown, and remained thus in prayer till sunset. Then, seeing that his companion had not moved, he said to him—

"Father, if you are now out of the ecstasy in which you were lost, give me your blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ."

The other replied without turning his head—

"Stranger, I understand you not, and I know not the Lord Jesus Christ."

"What!" cried Paphnutius. "The prophets have announced Him; legions of martyrs have confessed His name; Cæsar himself has worshipped Him, and, but just now, I made the sphinx of Silsile proclaim His glory. Is it possible that you do not know Him?"

"Friend," replied the other, "it is possible. It

would even be certain, if anything in this world were certain."

Paphnutius was surprised and saddened by the incredible ignorance of the man.

"If you know not Jesus Christ," he said, "all your works serve no purpose, and you will never rise to life immortal."

The old man replied—

"It is useless to act, or to abstain from acting. It matters not whether we live or die."

"Eh, what?" asked Paphnutius. "Do you not desire to live through all eternity? But, tell me, do you not live in a hut in the desert as the hermits do?"

"It seems so."

"Do I not see you naked, and lacking all things?"

"It seems so."

"Do you not feed on roots, and live in chastity?"

"It seems so."

"Have you not renounced all the vanities of this world?"

"I have truly renounced all those vain things for which men commonly care."

"Then you are like me, poor, chaste, and solitary. And you are not so—as I am—for the love of God, and with a hope of celestial happiness! That I cannot understand. Why are you virtuous if you

do not believe in Jesus Christ? Why deprive yourself of the good things of this world if you do not hope to gain eternal riches in heaven?"

"Stranger, I deprive myself of nothing which is good, and I flatter myself that I have found a life which is satisfactory enough, though—to speak more precisely—there is no such thing as a good or evil life. Nothing is itself, either virtuous or shameful, just or unjust, pleasant or painful, good or bad. It is our opinion which gives those qualities to things, as salt gives savour to meats."

"So then, according to you there is no certainty. You deny the truth which the idolaters themselves have sought. You lie in ignorance—like a tired dog sleeping in the mud."

"Stranger, it is equally useless to abuse either dogs or philosophers. We know not what dogs are or what we are. We know nothing."

"Old man, do you belong, then, to the absurd sect of sceptics? Are you one of those miserable fools who alike deny movement and rest, and who know not how to distinguish between the light of the sun and the shadows of night?"

"Friend, I am truly a sceptic, and of a sect which appears praiseworthy to me, though it seems ridiculous to you. For the same things often assume different appearances. The pyramids of Memphis

seem at sunrise to be cones of pink light. At sunset they look like black triangles against the illuminated sky. But who shall solve the problem of their true nature? You reproach me with denying appearances, when, in fact, appearances are the only realities I recognise. The sun seems to me illuminous, but its nature is unknown to me. I feel that fire burns—but I know not how or why. My friend, you understand me badly. Besides, it is indifferent to me whether I am understood one way or the other."

"Once more. Why do you live on dates and onions in the desert? Why do you endure great hardships? I endure hardships equally great, and, like you, I live in abstinence and solitude. But then it is to please God, and to earn eternal happiness. And that is a reasonable object, for it is wise to suffer now for a future gain. It is senseless, on the contrary, to expose yourself voluntarily to useless fatigue and vain sufferings. If I did not believe—pardon my blasphemy, O uncreated Light! —if I did not believe in the truth of that which God has taught us by the voice of the prophets, by the example of His Son, by the acts of the Apostles, by the authority of councils, and by the testimony of the martyrs,—if I did not know that the sufferings of the body are necessary for the salvation of the

soul—if I were, like thee, lost in ignorance of sacred mysteries—I would return at once amongst the men of this day, I would strive to acquire riches, that I might live in ease, like those who are happy in this world, and I would say to the votaries of pleasure, 'Come, my daughters, come, my servants, come and pour out for me your wines, your philtres, your perfumes.' But you, foolish old man! you deprive yourself of all these advantages; you lose without hope of any gain; you give without hope of any return, and you imitate foolishly the noble deeds of us anchorites, as an impudent monkey thinks, by smearing a wall, to copy the picture of a clever artist. What, then, are your reasons, O most besotted of men?"

Paphnutius spoke with violence and indignation, but the old man remained unmoved.

"Friend," he replied, gently, "what matter the reasons of a dog sleeping in the dirt or a mischievous ape?"

Paphnutius' only aim was the glory of God. His anger vanished, and he apologised with noble humility.

"Pardon me, old man, my brother," he said, "if zeal for the truth has carried me beyond proper bounds. God is my witness, that it is thy errors and not thyself that I hate. I suffer to see thee in

darkness, for I love thee in Jesus Christ, and care for thy salvation fills my heart. Speak! give me your reasons. I long to know them that I may refute them."

The old man replied quietly—

"It is the same to me whether I speak or remain silent. I will give my reasons without asking yours in return, for I have no interest in you at all. I care neither for your happiness nor your misfortune, and it matters not to me whether you think one way or another. Why should I love you, or hate you? Aversion and sympathy are equally unworthy of the wise man. But since you question me, know then that I am named Timocles, and that I was born at Cos, of parents made rich by commerce. My father was a shipowner. In intelligence he much resembled Alexander, who is surnamed the Great. But he was not so gross. In short, he was a man of no great parts. I had two brothers, who, like him, were shipowners. As for me, I followed wisdom. My eldest brother was compelled by my father to marry a Carian woman, named Timaessa, who displeased him so greatly that he could not live with her without falling into a deep melancholy. However, Timaessa inspired our younger brother with a criminal passion, and this passion soon turned to a furious madness. The

Carian woman hated them both equally; but she loved a flute-player, and received him at night in her chamber. One morning he left there the wreath which he usually wore at feasts. My two brothers, having found this wreath, swore to kill the flute-player, and the next day they caused him to perish under the lash, in spite of his tears and prayers. My sister-in-law felt such grief that she lost her reason, and these three poor wretches became beasts rather than human beings, and wandered insane along the shores of Cos, howling like wolves and foaming at the mouth, and hooted at by the children, who threw shells and stones at them. They died, and my father buried them with his own hands. A little later his stomach refused all nourishment, and he died of hunger, though he was rich enough to have bought all the meats and fruits in the markets of Asia. He was deeply grieved at having to leave me his fortune. I used it in travels. I visited Italy, Greece, and Africa without meeting a single person who was either wise or happy. I studied philosophy at Athens and Alexandria, and was deafened by noisy arguments. At last I wandered as far as India, and I saw on the banks of the Ganges a naked man, who had sat there motionless with his legs crossed for more than thirty years. Climbing plants twined round his dried up body,

and the birds built their nests in his hair. Yet he lived. At the sight of him I called to mind Timaessa, the flute-player, my two brothers, and my father, and I realised that this Indian was a wise man. 'Men,' I said to myself, 'suffer because they are deprived of that which they believe to be good; or because, possessing it they fear to lose it; or because they endure that which they believe to be an evil. Put an end to all beliefs of this kind, and the evils would disappear.' That is why I resolved henceforth to deem nothing an advantage, to tear myself entirely from the good things of this world, and to live silent and motionless, like the Indian."

Paphnutius had listened attentively to the old man's story.

"Timocles of Cos," he replied, "I own that your discourse is not wholly devoid of sense. It is, in truth, wise to despise the riches of this world. But it would be absurd to despise also your eternal welfare, and render yourself liable to be visited by the wrath of God. I grieve at your ignorance, Timocles, and I will instruct you in the truth, in order that knowing that there really exists a God in three hypostases, you may obey this God as a child obeys its father."

Timocles interrupted him.

"Refrain, stranger, from showing me your doc-

trines, and do not imagine that you will persuade me to share your opinions. All discussions are useless. My opinion is to have no opinion. My life is devoid of trouble because I have no preferences. Go thy ways, and strive not to withdraw me from the beneficent apathy in which I am plunged, as though in a delicious bath, after the hardships of my past days."

Paphnutius was profoundly instructed in all things relating to the faith. By his knowledge of the human heart, he was aware that the grace of God had not fallen on old Timocles, and the day of salvation for this soul so obstinately resolved to ruin itself had not yet come. He did not reply, lest the power given for edification should turn to destruction. For it sometimes happens, in disputing with infidels, that the means used for their conversion may steep them still farther in sin. Therefore they who possess the truth should take care how they spread it.

"Farewell, then, unhappy Timocles," he said; and heaving a deep sigh, he resumed his pious pilgrimage through the night.

In the morning, he saw the ibises motionless on one leg at the edge of the water, which reflected their pale pink necks. The willows stretched their soft grey foliage to the bank, cranes flew in

a triangle in the clear sky, and the cry of unseen herons was heard from the sedges. Far as the eye could reach, the river rolled its broad green waters o'er which white sails, like the wings of birds, glided, and here and there on the shores, a white house shone out. A light mist floated along the banks, and from out the shadow of the islands, which were laden with palms, flowers, and fruits, came noisy flocks of ducks, geese, flamingoes, and teal. To the left, the grassy valley extended to the desert its fields and orchards in joyful abundance; the sun shone on the yellow wheat, and the earth exhaled forth its fecundity in odorous wafts. At this sight, Paphnutius fell on his knees, and cried—

"Blessed be the Lord, who has given a happy issue to my journey. O God, who spreadest Thy dew upon the fig trees of the Arsiniote, pour Thy grace upon Thaïs, whom Thou hast formed with Thy love, as Thou hast the flowers and trees of the field. May she, by Thy loving care, flourish like a sweet-scented rose in the heavenly Jerusalem."

And every time that he saw a tree covered with blossom, or a bird of brilliant plumage, he thought of Thaïs. Keeping along the left arm of the river and through a fertile and populous district, he reached, in a few days, the city of Alexandria, which the Greeks have surnamed the Beautiful and the

Golden. The sun had risen an hour, when he beheld, from the top of a hill, the vast city, the roofs of which glittered in the rosy light. He stopped, and folded his arms on his breast.

"There, then," he said, "is the delightful spot where I was born in sin; the bright air where I breathed poisonous perfumes; the sea of pleasure where I heard the songs of the sirens. There is my cradle, after the flesh; my native land—in the parlance of the men of these days! A rich cradle, an illustrious country, in the judgment of men! It is natural that thy children should reverence thee like a mother, Alexandria, and I was begotten in thy magnificently adorned breast. But the ascetic despises nature, the mystic scorns appearances, the Christian regards his native land as a place of exile, the monk is not of this earth. I have turned away my heart from loving thee, Alexandria. I hate thee! I hate thee for thy riches, thy science, thy pleasures, and thy beauty. Be accursed, temple of demons! Lewd couch of the Gentiles, tainted pulpit of Arian heresy, be thou accursed! And thou, winged son of heaven who led the holy hermit Anthony, our father, when he came from the depths of the desert, and entered into the citadel of idolatry to strengthen the faith of believers and the confidence of martyrs, beautiful angel of the Lord, in-

visible child, first breath of God, fly thou before me, and cleanse, by the beating of thy wings, the corrupted air I am about to breathe amongst the princes of darkness of this world!"

Having thus spoken, he resumed his journey. He entered the city by the Gate of the Sun. This gate was a handsome structure of stone. In the shadow of its arch, crowded some poor wretches, who offered lemons and figs for sale, or with many groans and lamentations, begged for an obolus.

An old woman in rags, who was kneeling there, seized the monk's cassock, kissed it, and said—

"Man of the Lord, bless me, that God may bless me. I have suffered many things in this world that I may have joys in the world to come. You come from God, O holy man, and that is why the dust of your feet is more precious than gold."

"The Lord be praised!" said Paphnutius, and with his half-closed hand he made the sign of redemption on the old woman's head.

But hardly had he gone twenty paces down the street, than a band of children began to jeer at him, and throw stones, crying—

"Oh, the wicked monk! He is blacker than an ape, and more bearded than a goat! He is a skulker! Why not hang him in an orchard, like a wooden Priapus, to frighten the birds? But no;

he would draw down the hail on the apple-blossom. He brings bad luck. To the ravens with the monk! to the ravens!" and stones mingled with the cries.

"My God, bless these poor children!" murmured Paphnutius.

And he pursued his way, thinking.

"I was worshipped by the old woman, and hated and despised by these children. Thus the same object is appreciated differently by men who are uncertain in their judgment and liable to error. It must be owned that, for a Gentile, old Timocles was not devoid of sense. Though blind, he knew he was deprived of light. His reasoning was much better than that of these idolaters, who cry from the depths of their thick darkness, 'I see the day!' Everything in this world is mirage and moving sand. God alone is steadfast."

He passed through the city with rapid steps. After ten years of absence he would still recognise every stone, and every stone was to him a stone of reproach that recalled a sin. For that reason he struck his naked feet roughly against the kerb-stones of the wide street, and rejoiced to see the bloody marks of his wounded feet. Leaving on his left the magnificent portico of the Temple of Serapis, he entered a road lined with splendid mansions, which seemed to be drowsy with perfumes. Pines, maples,

and larches raised their heads above the red cornices and golden acroteria. Through the half-open doors could be seen bronze statues in marble vestibules, and fountains playing amidst foliage. No noise troubled the stillness of these quiet retreats. Only the distant strains of a flute could be heard. The monk stopped before a house, rather small, but of noble proportions, and supported by columns as graceful as young girls. It was ornamented with bronze busts of the most celebrated Greek philosophers.

He recognised Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno, and having knocked with the hammer against the door, he waited, wrapped in meditation.

"It is vanity to glorify in metal these false sages; their lies are confounded, their souls are lost in hell, and even the famous Plato himself, who filled the earth with his eloquence, now disputes with the devils."

A slave opened the door, and seeing a man with bare feet standing on the mosaic threshold, said to him roughly—

"Go and beg elsewhere, stupid monk, or I will drive you away with a stick."

"Brother," replied the Abbott of Antinoë, "all that I ask is that you conduct me to your master, Nicias."

The slave replied, more angrily than before—

"My master does not see dogs like you."

"My son," said Paphnutius, "will you please do what I ask, and tell your master that I desire to see him.

"Get out, vile beggar!" cried the porter furiously; and he raised his stick and struck the holy man, who, with his arms crossed upon his breast, received unmovedly the blow, which fell full in his face, and then repeated gently—

"Do as I ask you, my son, I beg."

The porter tremblingly murmured—

"Who is this man who is not afraid of suffering?"

And he ran and told his master.

Nicias had just left the bath. Two pretty slave girls were scraping him with strigils. He was a pleasant-looking man, with a kind smile. There was an expression of gentle satire in his face. On seeing the monk, he rose and advanced with open arms.

"It is you!" he cried, "Paphnutius, my fellow-scholar, my friend my brother! Oh, I knew you again, though, to say the truth, you look more like a wild animal than a man. Embrace me. Do you remember the time when we studied grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy together? You were,

even then, of a morose and wild character, but I liked you because of your complete sincerity. We used to say that you looked at the universe with the eyes of a wild horse, and it was not surprising you were dull and moody. You needed a pinch of Attic salt, but your liberality knew no bounds. You cared nothing for either your money or your life. And you had the eccentricity of genius, and a strange character which interested me deeply. You are welcome, my dear Paphnutius, after ten years of absence. You have quitted the desert; you have renounced all Christian superstitions, and now return to your old life. I will mark this day with a white stone."

"Crobyle and Myrtale," he added, turning towards the girls, "perfume the feet, hands, and beard of my dear guest."

They smiled, and had already brought the basin, the phials, and the metal mirror. But Paphnutius stopped them with an imperious gesture, and lowered his eyes that he might not look upon them, for they were naked. Nicias brought cushions for him, and offered him various meats and drinks, which Paphnutius scornfully refused.

"Nicias," he said, "I have not renounced what you falsely call the Christian superstition, which is the truth of truths. 'In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was the life, and the life was the light of men.' "

"My dear Paphnutius," replied Nicias, who had now put on a perfumed tunic, "do you expect to astonish me by reciting a lot of words jumbled together without skill, which are no more than a vain murmur? Have you forgotten that I am a bit of a philosopher myself? And do you think to satisfy me with some rags, torn by ignorant men from the purple garment of Æmilius, when Æmilius, Porphyry, and Plato, in all their glory, did not satisfy me! The systems devised by the sages are but tales imagined to amuse the eternal childishness of men. We divert ourselves with them, as we do with the stories of *The Ass, The Tub,* and *The Ephesian Matron,* or any other Milesian fable."

And, taking his guest by the arm, he led him into a room where thousands of papyri were rolled up and lay in baskets.

"This is my library," he said. "It contains a small part of the various systems which the philosophers have constructed to explain the world. The Serapeium itself, with all its riches, does not contain

them all. Alas! they are but the dreams of sick men."

He compelled his guest to sit down in an ivory chair, and sat down himself. Paphnutius scowled gloomily at all the books in the library, and said—

"They ought all to be burned."

"Oh, my dear guest, that would be a pity!" replied Nicias. "For the dreams of sick men are sometimes amusing. Besides, if we should destroy all the dreams and visions of men, the earth would lose its form and colours, and we should all sleep in a dull stupidity."

Paphnutius continued in the same strain as before—

"It is certain that the doctrines of the pagans are but vain lies. But God, who is the truth, revealed Himself to men by miracles, and He was made flesh, and lived among us."

Nicias replied—

"You speak well, my dear Paphnutius, when you say that he was made flesh. A God who thinks, acts, speaks, who wanders through nature, like Ulysses of old on the glaucous sea, is altogether a man. How do you expect that we should believe in this new Jupiter, when the urchins of Athens, in the time of Pericles, no longer believed in the old one?

But let us leave all that. You did not come here, I suppose, to argue about the three hypostases. What can I do for you, my dear fellow-scholar?"

"A good deed," replied the Abbot of Antinoë. "Lend me a perfumed tunic, like the one you have just put on. Be kind enough to add to the tunic, gilt sandals, and a vial of oil to anoint my beard and hair. It is needful also, that you should give me a purse with a thousand drachmæ in it. That, O Nicias, is what I came to ask of you, for the love of God, and in remembrance of our old friendship."

Nicias made Crobyle and Myrtale bring his richest tunic; it was embroidered, after the Asiatic fashion, with flowers and animals. The two girls held it open, and skilfully showed its bright colours, waiting till Paphnutius should have taken off the cassock which covered him down to his feet. But the monk having declared that they should rather tear off his flesh than this garment, they put on the tunic over it. As the two girls were pretty, they were not afraid of men, although they were slaves. They laughed at the strange appearance of the monk thus clad. Crobyle called him her dear satrap, as she presented him with the mirror, and Myrtale pulled his beard. But Paphnutius prayed to the Lord, and did not look at them. Having tied on the gilt

sandals, and fastened the purse to his belt, he said to Nicias, who was looking at him with an amused expression—

"O Nicias, let not these things be an offence in your eyes. For know that I shall make pious use of this tunic, this purse, and these sandals."

"My dear friend," replied Nicias, "I suspect no evil, for I believe that men are equally incapable of doing evil or doing good. Good and evil exist only in the opinion. The wise man has only custom and usage to guide him in his acts. I conform with all the prejudices which prevail at Alexandria. That is why I pass for an honest man. Go, friend, and enjoy yourself."

But Paphnutius thought that it was needful to inform his host of his intention.

"Do you know Thaïs," he said, "who acts in the games at the theatre?"

"She is beautiful," replied Nicias, "and there was a time when she was dear to me. For her sake, I sold a mill and two fields of corn, and I composed in her honour three books full of detestably bad verses. Surely beauty is the most powerful force in the world, and were we so made that we could possess it always, we should care as little as may be for the demiurgos, the logos, the æons, and all the other reveries of the philosophers. But I am surprised,

my good Paphnutius, that you should have come from the depths of the Thebaid to talk about Thaïs."

Having said this, he sighed gently. And Paphnutius gazed at him with horror, not conceiving it possible that a man should so calmly avow such a sin. He expected to see the earth open, and Nicias swallowed up in flames. But the earth remained solid, and the Alexandrian silent, his forehead resting on his hand, and he smiling sadly at the memories of his past youth. The monk rose, and continued in solemn tones—

"Know then, O Nicias, that, with the aid of God, I will snatch this woman Thaïs from the unclean affections of the world, and give her as a spouse to Jesus Christ. If the Holy Spirit does not forsake me, Thaïs will leave this city and enter a nunnery."

"Beware of offending Venus," replied Nicias. "She is a powerful goddess, she will be angry with you if you take away her chief minister."

"God will protect me," said Paphnutius. "May He also illumine thy heart, O Nicias, and draw thee out of the abyss in which thou art plunged."

And he stalked out of the room. But Nicias followed him, and overtook him on the threshold, and placing his hand on his shoulder whispered into his ear the same words—

"Beware of offending Venus; her vengeance is terrible."

Paphnutius, disdainful of these trivial words, left without turning his head. He felt only contempt for Nicias; but what he could not bear was the idea that his former friend had received the caresses of Thaïs. It seemed to him that to sin with that woman was more detestable than to sin with any other. To him this appeared the height of iniquity, and he henceforth looked upon Nicias as an object of execration. He had always hated impurity, but never before had this vice appeared so heinous to him; never before had it so seemed to merit the anger of Jesus Christ and the sorrow of the angels.

He felt only a more ardent desire to save Thaïs from the Gentiles, and that he must hasten to see the actress in order to save her. Nevertheless, before he could enter her house, he must wait till the heat of the day was over, and now the morning had hardly finished. Paphnutius wandered through the most frequented streets. He had resolved to take no food that day, in order to be the less unworthy of the favours he had asked of the Lord. To the great grief of his soul, he dared not enter any of the churches in the city, because he knew they were profaned by the Arians, who had overturned the Lord's table. For, in fact, these heretics, supported

by the Emperor of the East, had driven the patriarch Athanasius from his episcopate, and sown trouble and confusion among the Christians of Alexandria.

He therefore wandered about aimlessly, sometimes with his eyes fixed on the ground in humility, and sometimes raised to heaven in ecstasy. After some time, he found himself on the quay. Before him lay the harbour, in which were sheltered innumerable ships and galleys, and beyond them, smiling in blue and silver, lay the perfidious sea. A galley, which bore a Nereid at its prow, had just weighed anchor. The rowers sang as the oars struck the water; and already the white daughter of the waters, covered with humid pearls, showed no more than a flying profile to the monk. Steered by her pilot, she cleared the passage leading from the basin of the Eunostos, and gained the high seas, leaving a glittering trail behind her.

"I also," thought Paphnutius, "once desired to embark singing on the ocean of the world. But I soon saw my folly, and the Nereid did not carry me away."

Lost in his thoughts, he sat down upon a coil of rope, and went to sleep. During his sleep, he had a vision. He seemed to hear the sound of a clanging trumpet, and the sky became blood red, and he

knew that the day of judgment had come. Whilst he was fervently praying to God, he saw an enormous monster coming towards him, bearing on its forehead a cross of light, and he recognised the sphinx of Silsile. The monster seized him between its teeth, without hurting him, and carried him in its mouth, as a cat carries a kitten. Paphnutius was thus conveyed across many countries, crossing rivers and traversing mountains, and came at last to a desert place, covered with scowling rocks and hot cinders. The ground was rent in many places, and through these openings came a hot air. The monster gently put Paphnutius down on the ground, and said—

"Look!"

And Paphnutius, leaning over the edge of the abyss, saw a river of fire which flowed in the interior of the earth, between two cliffs of black rocks. There, in a livid light, the demons tormented the souls of the damned. The souls preserved the appearance of the bodies which had held them, and even wore some rags of clothing. These souls seemed peaceful in the midst of their torments. One of them, tall and white, his eyes closed, a white fillet across his forehead, and a sceptre in his hand, sang; his voice filled the desert shores with harmony; he sang of gods and heroes. Little green

devils pierced his lips and throat with red-hot irons. And the shade of Homer still sang. Near by, old Anaxagoras, bald and hoary, traced figures in the dust with a compass. A demon poured boiling oil into his ear, yet failed, however, to disturb the sage's meditations. And the monk saw many other persons, who, on the dark shore by the side of the burning river, read, or quietly meditated, or conversed with other spirits while walking,—like the sages and pupils under the shadow of the sycamore trees of Academe. Old Timocles alone had withdrawn from the others, and shook his head like a man who denies. One of the demons of the abyss shook a torch before his eyes, but Timocles would see neither the demon nor the torch.

Mute with surprise at this spectacle, Paphnutius turned to the monster. It had disappeared, and, in place of the sphinx, the monk saw a veiled woman, who said—

"Look and understand. Such is the obstinacy of these infidels, that, even in hell, they remain victims of the illusions which deluded them when on earth. Death has not undeceived them; for it is very plain that it does not suffice merely to die in order to see God. Those who are ignorant of the truth whilst living, will be ignorant of it always. The demons which are busy torturing these souls, what are they

but agents of divine justice? That is why these souls neither see them nor feel them. They were ignorant of the truth, and therefore unaware of their own condemnation, and God Himself cannot compel them to suffer.

"God can do all things," said the Abbot of Antinoë.

"He cannot do that which is absurd," replied the veiled woman. "To punish them, they must first be enlightened, and if they possessed the truth, they would be like unto the elect."

Vexed and horrified, Paphnutius again bent over the edge of the abyss. He saw the shade of Nicias smiling, with a wreath of flowers on his head, sitting under a burnt myrtle tree. By his side was Aspasia of Miletus, gracefully draped in a woollen cloak, and they seemed to talk together of love and philosophy; the expression of her face was sweet and noble. The rain of fire which fell on them was as a refreshing dew, and their feet pressed the burning soil as though it had been tender grass. At this sight Paphnutius was filled with fury.

"Strike him, O God! strike him!" he cried. "It is Nicias! Let him weep! let him groan! let him grind his teeth! He sinned with Thaïs!"

And Paphnutius woke in the arms of a sailor, as strong as Hercules, who cried—

"Quietly! quietly! my friend! By Proteus, the old shepherd of the seals, you slumber uneasily. If I had not caught hold of you, you would have tumbled into the Eunostos. It is as true as that my mother sold salt fish, that I saved your life."

"I thank God," replied Paphnutius.

And, rising to his feet, he walked straight before him, meditating on the vision which had come to him whilst he was asleep.

"This vision," he said to himself, "is plainly an evil one; it is an insult to divine goodness to imagine hell is unreal. The dream certainly came from the devil."

He reasoned thus because he knew how to distinguish between the dreams sent by God and those produced by evil angels. Such discernment is useful to the hermit, who lives surrounded by apparitions, and who, in avoiding men, is sure to meet with spirits. The deserts are full of phantoms. When the pilgrim drew near the ruined castle, to which the holy hermit, Anthony, had retired, they heard a noise like that which goes up from the public square of a large city at a great festival. The noise was made by the devils, who were tempting the holy man.

Paphnutius remembered this memorable example. He also called to mind St. John the Egyptian, who

for sixty years was tempted by the devil. But John saw through all the tricks of the demon. One day, however, the devil, having assumed the appearance of a man, entered the grotto of the venerable John, and said to him, "John, you must continue to fast until to-morrow evening." And John, believing that it was an angel who spoke, obeyed the voice of the demon, and fasted the next day until the vesper hour. That was the only victory that the Prince of Darkness ever gained over St. John the Egyptian, and that was but a trifling one. It was therefore not astonishing that Paphnutius knew at once that the vision which had visited him in his sleep was an evil one.

Whilst he was gently remonstrating with God for having given him into the power of the demons, he felt himself pushed and dragged amidst a crowd of people who were all hurrying in the same direction. As he was unaccustomed to walk in the streets of a city, he was shoved and knocked from one passer to another like an inert mass; and being embarrassed by the folds of his tunic, he was more than once on the point of falling. Desirous of knowing where all these people could be going, he asked one of them the cause of this hurry.

"Do you not know, stranger," replied he, "that the games are about to begin, and that Thaïs will

appear on the stage? All the citizens are going to the theatre, and I also am going. Would you like to accompany me?"

It occurred to him at once that it would further his design to see Thaïs in the games, and Paphnutius followed the stranger. In front of them stood the theatre, its portico ornamented with shining masks, and its huge circular wall covered with innumerable statues. Following the crowd, they entered a narrow passage, at the end of which lay the amphitheatre, glittering with light. They took their places on one of the seats, which descended in steps to the stage, which was empty but magnificently decorated. There was no curtain to hide the view, and on the stage was a mound, such as used to be erected in old times to the shades of heroes. This mound stood in the midst of a camp. Lances were stacked in front of the tents, and golden shields hung from masts, amidst boughs of laurel and wreaths of oak. On the stage all was silence, but a murmur like the humming of bees in a hive rose from the vast hemicycle filled with spectators. All their faces, reddened by the reflection from the purple awning which waved above them, turned with attentive curiosity towards the large, silent stage, with its tomb and tents. The women laughed and

ate lemons, and the regular theatre-goers called gaily to one another from their seats.

Paphnutius prayed inwardly, and refrained from uttering any vain words, but his neighbour began to complain of the decline of the drama.

"Formerly," he said, "clever actors used to declaim, under a mask, the verses of Euripides and Menander. Now they no longer recite dramas, they act in dumb show; and of the divine spectacles with which Bacchus was honoured in Athens, we have kept nothing but what a barbarian—a Scythian even—could understand—attitude and gesture. The tragic mask, the mouth of which was provided with metal tongues that increased the sound of the voice; the cothurnus, which raised the actors to the height of gods; the tragic majesty and the splendid verses that used to be sung, have all gone. Pantomimists, and dancing girls with bare faces, have replaced Paulus and Roscius. What would the Athenians of the days of Pericles have said if they had seen a woman on the stage? It is indecent for a woman to appear in public. We must be very degenerate to permit it. It is as certain as that my name is Dorion, that woman is the natural enemy of man, and a disgrace to human kind."

"You speak wisely," replied Paphnutius; "woman

is our worst enemy. She gives us pleasure, and is to be feared on that account."

"By the immovable gods," cried Dorion, "it is not pleasure that woman gives to man, but sadness, trouble, and black cares. Love is the cause of our most biting evils. Listen, stranger. When I was a young man I visited Trœzene, in Argolis, and I saw there a myrtle of a most prodigious size, the leaves of which were covered with innumerable pin-holes. And this is what the Trœzenians say about that myrtle. Queen Phædra, when she was in love with Hippolytos, used to recline idly all day long under this same tree. To beguile the tedium of her weary life she used to draw out the golden pin which held her fair locks, and pierce with it the leaves of the sweet-scented bush. All the leaves were riddled with holes. After she had ruined the poor young man whom she pursued with her incestuous love, Phædra, as you know, perished miserably. She locked herself up in her bridal chamber, and hanged herself by her golden girdle from an ivory peg. The gods willed that the myrtle, the witness of her bitter misery, should continue to bear, in its fresh leaves, the marks of the pin-holes. I picked one of these leaves, and placed it at the head of my bed, that by the sight of it I might take warning against the folly of love, and conform to the doctrine of

the divine Epicurus, my master, who taught that all lust is to be feared. But, properly speaking, love is a disease of the liver, and one is never sure of not catching the malady."

Paphnutius asked—

"Dorion, what are your pleasures?"

Dorion replied sadly—

"I have only one pleasure, and, it must be confessed, that it is not a very exciting one; it is meditation. When a man has a bad digestion, he must not look for any others."

Taking advantage of these words, Paphnutius proceeded to initiate the Epicurean into those spiritual joys which the contemplation of God procures. He began—

"Hear the truth, Dorion, and receive the light."

But he saw then that all heads were turned towards him, and everybody was making signs for him to be quiet. Dead silence prevailed in the theatre, broken at last by the strains of heroic music.

The play began. The soldiers left their tents, and were preparing to depart, when a prodigy occurred—a cloud covered the summit of the funeral pile. Then the cloud rolled away, and the ghost of Achilles appeared, clad in golden armour. Extending his arms towards the warriors, he seemed

to say to them, "What! do you depart, children of Danaos? do you return to the land I shall never behold again, and leave my tomb without any offerings?" Already the principal Greek chieftains pressed to the foot of the pile. Acamas, the son of Theseus, old Nestor, Agamemnon, bearing a sceptre and with a fillet on his brow, gazed at the prodigy. Pyrrhus, the young son of Achilles, was prostrate in the dust. Ulysses, recognisable by the cap which covered his curly hair, showed by his gestures that he acquiesced in the demand of the hero's shade. He argued with Agamemnon, and their words might be easily guessed—

"Achilles," said the King of Ithaca, "is worthy to be honoured by us, for he died gloriously for Hellas. He demands that the daughter of Priam, the virgin Polyxena, should be immolated on his tomb. Greeks! appease the manes of the hero, and let the son of Peleus rejoice in Hades."

But the king of kings replied—

"Spare the Trojan virgins we have torn from the altars. Sufficient misfortunes have already fallen on the illustrious race of Priam."

He spoke thus because he shared the couch of the sister of Polyxena, and the wise Ulysses reproached him for preferring the couch of Cassandra to the lance of Achilles.

The Greeks showed they shared the opinion of Ulysses, by loudly clashing their weapons. The death of Polyxena was resolved on, and the appeased shade of Achilles vanished. The music—sometimes wild and sometimes plaintive—followed the thoughts of the personages in the drama. The spectators burst into applause.

Paphnutius, who applied divine truth to everything murmured—

"This fable shows how cruel the worshippers of false gods were."

"All religions breed crimes," replied the Epicurean. "Happily, a Greek, who was divinely wise, has freed men from foolish terrors of the unknown—"

Just at that moment, Hecuba, her white hair dishevelled, her robe tattered, came out of the tent in which she was kept captive. A long sigh went up from the audience, when her woeful figure appeared. Hecuba had been warned by a prophetic dream, and lamented her daughter's fate and her own. Ulysses approached her, and asked her to give up Polyxena. The old mother tore her hair, dug her nails into her cheeks, and kissed the hands of the cruel chieftain, who, with unpitying calmness, seemed to say—

"Be wise, Hecuba, and yield to necessity. There

are amongst us many old mothers who weep for their children, now sleeping under the pines of Ida."

And Hecuba, formerly queen of the most flourishing city in Asia, and now a slave, bowed her unhappy head in the dust.

Then the curtain in front of one of the tents was raised, and the virgin Polyxena appeared. A tremor passed through all the spectators. They had recognised Thaïs. Paphnutius saw again the woman he had come to seek. With her white arm she held above her head the heavy curtain. Motionless as a splendid statue, she stood, with a look of pride and resignation in her violet eyes, and her resplendent beauty made a shudder of commiseration pass through all who beheld her.

A murmur of applause uprose, and Paphnutius, his soul agitated, and pressing both hands to his heart, sighed—

"Why, O my God, hast thou given this power to one of Thy creatures?"

Dorion was not so disturbed. He said—

"Certainly the atoms, which have momentarily met together to form this woman, present a combination which is agreeable to the eye. But that is but a freak of nature, and the atoms know not what they do. They will some day separate with the same indifference as they came together. Where are

now the atoms which formed Laïs or Cleopatra? I must confess that women are sometimes beautiful. But they are liable to grievous afflictions, and disgusting inconveniences. That is patent to all thinking men, though the vulgar pay no attention to it. And women inspire love, though it is absurd and ridiculous to love them."

Such were the thoughts of the philosopher and the ascetic as they gazed on Thaïs. They neither of them noticed Hecuba, who turned to her daughter, and seemed to say by her gestures—

"Try to soften the cruel Ulysses. Employ your tears, your beauty, and your youth."

Thaïs—or rather Polyxena herself—let fall the curtain of the tent. She made a step forward, and all hearts were conquered. And when, with firm but light steps, she advanced towards Ulysses, her rhythmic movements, which were accompanied by the sound of flutes, created in all present such happy visions, that it seemed as though she were the divine centre of all the harmonies of the world. All eyes were bent on her; the other actors were obscured by her effulgence, and were not noticed. The play continued, however.

The prudent son of Laërtes turned away his head, and hid his hand under his mantle, in order to avoid the looks and kisses of the suppliant. The

virgin made a sign to him to fear nothing. Her tranquil gaze said—

"I follow you, Ulysses, and bow to necessity—because I wish to die. Daughter of Priam, and sister of Hector, my couch, which was once worthy of Kings, shall never receive a foreign master. Freely do I quit the light of day."

Hecuba, lying motionless in the dust, suddenly rose and enfolded her daughter in a last despairing embrace. Polyxena gently, but resolutely, removed the old arms which held her. She seemed to say—

"Do not expose yourself, mother, to the fury of your master. Do not wait until he drags you ignominiously on the ground in tearing me from your arms. Better, O well-beloved mother, to give me your wrinkled hand, and bend your hollow cheeks to my lips."

The face of Thaïs looked beautiful in its grief. The crowd felt grateful to her for showing them the forms and passions of life endowed with superhuman grace, and Paphnutius pardoned her present splendour on account of her coming humility, and glorified himself in advance for the saint he was about to give to heaven.

The drama neared its end. Hecuba fell as though dead, and Polyxena, led by Ulysses, advanced towards the tomb, which was surrounded by the

chief warriors. A dirge was sung as she mounted the funeral pile, on the summit of which the son of Achilles poured out libations from a gold cup to the names of the hero. When the sacrificing priests stretched out their arms to seize her, she made a sign that she wished to die free and unbound, as befitted the daughter of so many kings. Then, tearing aside her robe, she bared her bosom to the blow. Pyrrhus, turning away his head, plunged his sword into her heart, and by a skilful trick, the blood gushed forth over the dazzling white breast of the virgin, who, with head thrown back, and her eyes swimming in the horrors of death, fell with grace and modesty.

Whilst the warriors enshrouded the victim with a veil, and covered her with lilies and anemones, terrified screams and groans rent the air, and Paphnutius, rising from his seat, prophesied in a loud voice.

"Gentiles? vile worshippers of demons! And you Arians more infamous than the idolaters!—learn! That which you have just seen is an image and a symbol. There is a mystic meaning in this fable, and very soon the woman you see there will be offered, a willing and happy sacrifice, to the risen God."

But already the crowd was surging in dark waves

towards the exits. The Abbot of Antinoë, escaping from the astonished Dorion, gained the door, still prophesying.

An hour later he knocked at the door of the house of Thaïs.

The actress then lived in the rich Racotis quarter, near the tomb of Alexander, in a house surrounded by shady gardens, in which a brook, bordered with poplars, flowed amidst artificial rocks. An old black slave woman, loaded with rings, opened the door, and asked what he wanted.

"I wish to see Thaïs," he replied. "God is my witness that I came here for no other purpose."

As he wore a rich tunic, and spoke in an imperious manner, the slave allowed him to enter.

"You will find Thaïs," she said, "in the Grotto of Nymphs."

PART THE SECOND

THE PAPYRUS

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THE PAPYRUS

THAÏS was born of free, but poor, parents, who were idolaters. When she was a very little girl, her father kept, at Alexandria, near the Gate of the Moon, an inn, which was frequented by sailors. She still retained some vivid, but disconnected, memories of her early youth. She remembered her father, seated at the corner of the hearth with his legs crossed—tall, formidable, and quiet, like one of those old Pharaohs who are celebrated in the ballads sung by blind men at the street corners. She remembered also her thin, wretched mother, wandering like a hungry cat about the house, which she filled with the tones of her sharp voice, and the glitter of her phosphorescent eyes. They said in the neighbourhood that she was a witch, and changed into an owl at night, and flew to see her lovers. It was a lie. Thaïs knew well, having often watched her, that her mother practised no magic arts, but that she was eaten up with avarice, and counted all night the gains of the day. The idle father and the greedy mother let the child live

as best it could, like one of the fowls in the poultry-yard. She became very clever in extracting, one by one, the oboli from the belt of some drunken sailor, and in amusing the drinkers with artless songs and obscene words, the meaning of which she did not know. She passed from knee to knee, in a room reeking with the odours of fermented drinks and resiny wine-skins; then, her cheeks sticky with beer and pricked by rough beards, she escaped, clutching the oboli in her little hand, and ran to buy honey-cakes from an old woman who crouched behind her baskets under the Gate of the Moon. Every day the same scenes were repeated, the sailors relating their perilous adventures, then playing at dice or knuckle-bones, and blaspheming the gods, amid their shouting for the best beer of Cilicia.

Every night the child was awakened by the quarrels of the drunkards. Oyster-shells would fly across the tables, cutting the heads of those they hit, and the uproar was terrible. Sometimes she saw, by the light of the smoky lamps, the knives glitter, and the blood flow.

It humiliated her to think that the only person who showed her any human kindness in her young days was the mild and gentle Ahmes. Ahmes, the house-slave, a Nubian blacker than the pot he gravely skimmed, was as good as a long night's sleep.

Often he would take Thaïs on his knee, and tell her old tales about underground treasure-houses constructed for avaricious kings, who put to death the masons and architects. There were also tales about clever thieves who married kings' daughters, and courtesans who built pyramids. Little Thaïs loved Ahmes like a father, like a mother, like a nurse, and like a dog. She followed the slave into the cellar when he went to fill the amphoræ, and into the poultry-yard amongst the scraggy and ragged fowls, all beak, claws, and feathers, who flew swifter than eagles before the knife of the black cook. Often at night, on the straw, instead of sleeping, he built for Thaïs little water-mills, and ships no bigger than his hand, with all their rigging.

He had been badly treated by his masters; one of his ears was torn, and his body covered with scars. Yet his features always wore an air of joyous peace. And no one ever asked him whence he drew the consolation in his soul, and the peace in his heart. He was as simple as a child. As he performed his heavy tasks, he sang, in a harsh voice, hymns which made the child tremble and dream. He murmured, in a gravely joyous tone—

"Tell us, Mary, what thou hast seen where thou hast been?

I saw the shroud and the linen cloths, and the angels seated on the tomb.
And I saw the glory of the Risen One."

She asked him—

"Father, why do you sing about angels seated on a tomb?"

And he replied—

"Little light of my eyes, I sing of the angels because Jesus, our Lord, is risen to heaven."

Ahmes was a Christian. He had been baptised, and was known as Theodore at the meetings of the faithful, to which he went secretly during the hours allowed him for sleep.

At that time the Church was suffering the severest trials. By order of the Emperor, the churches had been thrown down, the holy books burned, the sacred vessels and candlesticks melted. The Christians had been deprived of all their honours, and expected nothing but death. Terror reigned over all the community at Alexandria, and the prisons were crammed with victims. It was whispered with horror amongst the faithful, that in Syria, in Arabia, in Mesopotamia, in Cappadocia, in all the empire, bishops and virgins had been flogged, tortured, crucified or thrown to wild beasts. Then Anthony, already celebrated for his visions and his solitary life, a prophet, and the head of all the Egyptian be-

lievers, descended like an eagle from his desert rock on the city of Alexandria, and, flying from church to church, fired the whole community with his holy ardour. Invisible to the pagans, he was present at the same time at all the meetings of Christians, endowing all with the spirit of strength and prudence by which he was animated. Slaves, in particular, were persecuted with singular severity. Many of them, seized with fright, denied the faith. Others, and by far the greater number, fled to the desert, hoping to live there, either as hermits or robbers. Ahmes, however, frequented the meetings as usual, visited the prisoners, buried the martyrs, and joyfully professed the religion of Christ. The great Anthony, who saw his unshaken zeal, before he returned into the desert, pressed the black slave in his arms, and gave him the kiss of peace.

When Thaïs was seven years old, Ahmes began to talk to her of God.

"The good Lord God," he said, "lived in heaven like a Pharaoh, under the tents of His harem, and under the trees of His gardens. He was the Ancient of Ancients, and older than the world; and He had but one Son, the Prince Jesus, whom He loved with all His heart, and who surpassed in beauty the virgins and the angels. And the good Lord God said to Prince Jesus—

" 'Leave My harem and My palace, and My date trees and My running waters. Descend to earth for the welfare of men. There Thou shalt be like a little child, and Thou shalt live poor amongst the poor. Suffering shall be Thy daily bread, and Thou shalt weep so profusely that Thy tears shall form rivers, in which the tired slave shall bathe with delight. Go, My Son!'

"Prince Jesus obeyed the good Lord, and He came down to earth, to a place named Bethlehem of Judæa. And He walked in fields, amidst the flowering anemones, saying to His companions.

" 'Blessed are they who hunger, for I will lead them to My Father's table! Blessed are they who thirst, for they shall drink of the fountains of heaven! Blessed are they who weep, for I will dry their tears with veils finer than those of the almehs!'

"That is why the poor loved Him, and believed in Him. But the rich hated Him; fearing that He should raise the poor above them. At that time, Cleopatra and Cæsar were powerful on the earth. They both hated Jesus, and they ordered the judges and priests to put Him to death. To obey the Queen of Egypt, the princes of Syria erected a cross on a high mountain, and they caused Jesus to die on this cross. But women washed His corpse, and buried it; and Prince Jesus, having broken the

door of His tomb, rose again to the good Lord, His Father.

"And, from that time, all those who believed in Him go to heaven.

"The Lord God opens His arms, and says to them—

" 'Ye are welcome, because ye love the Prince, My Son. Wash, and then eat.'

"They bathe to the sound of beautiful music, and, all the time they are eating, they see almehs dancing, and they listen to tales that never end. They are dearer to the good Lord God than the light of His eyes, because they are His guests, and they shall have for their portion the carpets of His house, and the pomegranates of His gardens."

Ahmes often spoke in this strain, and thus taught the truth to Thaïs. She wondered, and said—

"I should like to eat the pomegranates of the good Lord."

Ahmes replied—

"Only those who are baptised may taste the fruits of heaven."

And Thaïs asked to be baptised. Seeing by this that she believed in Jesus, the slave resolved to instruct her more fully, so that, being baptised, she might enter the Church; and he loved her as his spiritual daughter.

The child, unloved and uncared for by its selfish parents, had no bed in the house. She slept in a corner of the stable amongst the domestic animals, and there Ahmes came to her every night secretly.

He gently approached the mat on which she lay, and sat down on his heels, his legs bent and his body straight—a position hereditary to his race. His face and his body, which was clothed in black, were invisible in the darkness; but his big white eyes shone out, and there came from them a light like a ray of dawn through the chinks of a door. He spoke in a husky, monotonous tone, with a slight nasal twang that gave it the soft melody of music heard at night in the streets. Sometimes the breathing of an ass, or the soft lowing of an ox, accompanied, like a chorus of invisible spirits, the voice of the slave as he recited the gospels. His words flowed gently in the darkness, which they filled with zeal, mercy, and hope; and the neophyte, her hand in that of Ahmes, lulled by the monotonous sounds, and the vague visions in her mind, slept calm and smiling, amid the harmonies of the dark night and the holy mysteries, gazed down on by a star, which twinkled between the joists of the stable-roof.

The initiation lasted a whole year, till the time when the Christians joyfully celebrate the festival

of Easter. One night in the holy week, Thaïs, who was already asleep on her mat, felt herself lifted by the slave, whose eyes gleamed with a strange light. He was clad, not as usual in a pair of torn drawers, but in a long white cloak, beneath which he pressed the child, whispering to her—

"Come, my soul! Come, light of my eyes! Come, little sweetheart! Come and be clad in the baptismal robes!"

He carried the child pressed to his breast. Frightened and yet curious, Thaïs, her head out of the cloak, threw her arms round her friend's neck, and he ran with her through the darkness. They went down narrow, black alleys; they passed through the Jews' quarter; they skirted a cemetery, where the osprey uttered its dismal cry; they traversed an open space, passing under crosses on which hung the bodies of victims, and on the arms of the crosses the ravens clacked their beaks. Thaïs hid her head in the slave's breast. She did not dare to peep out all the rest of the way. Soon it seemed to her that she was going down under ground. When she reopened her eyes she found herself in a narrow cave, lighted by resin torches, on the walls of which were painted standing figures, which seemed to move and live in the flickering glare of the torches. They were men clad in long

tunics and carrying branches of palm, and around them were lambs, doves, and tendrils of vine.

Amongst these figures, Thaïs recognised Jesus of Nazareth, by the anemones flowering at his feet. In the centre of the cave, near a large stone font filled with water, stood an old man clad in a scarlet dalmatic embroidered with gold, and on his head a low mitre. His thin face ended in a long beard. He looked gentle and humble, in spite of his rich costume. This was Bishop Vivantius, an exiled dignitary of the Church of Cyrene, who now gained his livelihood by weaving common stuffs of goats' hair. Two poor children stood by his side. Close by, an old negress unfolded a little white robe. Ahmes set the child down on the ground, and kneeling before the Bishop, said—

"Father, this is the little soul, the child of my soul. I have brought her that you may, according to your promise, and if it please your holiness, bestow on her the baptism of life."

At these words the Bishop opened his arms, and showed his mutilated hands. His nails had been torn out because he had maintained the faith in the days of persecution. Thaïs was frightened, and threw herself into the arms of Ahmes. But the kind words of the priest reassured her.

"Fear nothing, dearly beloved little one. Thou

hast here a spiritual father, Ahmes, who is called Theodore amongst the faithful, and a kind mother in grace, who has prepared for thee, with her own hands, a white robe."

And turning towards the negress—

"She is called Nitida," he added, "and is a slave in this world, but in heaven she will be a spouse of Jesus."

Then he said to the child neophyte—

"Thaïs, dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty; and in His only Son, who died for our salvation; and in all that the apostles taught?"

"Yes," replied together the negro and negress, who held her by each hand.

By the Bishop's orders, Nitida knelt down and undressed Thaïs. The child was quite naked; round her neck was an amulet. The Pontiff plunged her three times into the baptismal font. The acolytes brought the oil, with which Vivantius anointed the catechumen, and the salt, a morsel of which he placed on her tongue. Then, having dried that body which was destined, after many trials, to life immortal, the slave Nitida put on Thaïs the white robe she had woven.

The Bishop gave to each and all the kiss of peace, and, the ceremony being terminated, took off his sacerdotal insignia.

When they had left the crypt, Ahmes said—

"We ought to rejoice that we have this day brought a soul to the good Lord God; let us go to the house of your Holiness and spend the rest of the night in rejoicing."

"Thou hast well said, Theodore," replied the Bishop, and he led the little band to his house, which was quite near. It consisted of a single room, furnished with a couple of looms, a heavy table, and a worn-out carpet. As soon as they had entered,

"Nitida," cried the Nubian, "bring hither the stove and the jar of oil, and we will have a good supper."

Saying thus, he drew from under his cloak some little fish which he had kept concealed, and lighted a fire and fried them. The Bishop, the girl, the two boys, and the two slaves sat in a ring on the carpet, ate the fried fish, and blessed the Lord. Vivantius spoke of the torture he had undergone, and prophesied the speedy triumph of the Church. His language was grotesque, and full of word-play and rhetorical tropes. He compared the life of the just to a tissue of purple, and to explain the mystery of baptism, he said—

"The Divine Spirit floated on the waters, and that is why Christians receive the baptism of water. But demons also inhabit the brooks; springs conse-

crated to nymphs are especially dangerous, and there are certain waters which cause various maladies, both of the soul and of the body."

Sometimes he spoke enigmatically, and the child listened to him with profound awe and wonder. At the end of the repast he offered his guests a little wine, and this unloosed their tongues, and they began to sing lamentations and hymns. Ahmes and Nitida then rose, and danced a Nubian dance which they had learned as children, and which, no doubt, had been danced by their tribe since the early ages of the world. It was a love dance; waving their arms, and moving their bodies in rhythmic measure, they feigned, in turn, to fly from and to pursue each other. Their big eyes rolled, and they showed their gleaming teeth in broad grins.

In this strange manner did Thaïs receive the holy rite of baptism.

She loved amusements, and, as she grew, vague desires were created in her mind. All day long she danced and sang with the children in the streets, and when at night she returned to her father's house, she was still singing—

> "Crooked twist, why do you stay in the house?
> I comb the wool, and the Miletan threads.
> Crooked twist, what did your son die of?
> He fell from the white horses into the sea."

She now began to prefer the company of boys and girls to that of the gentle and quiet Ahmes. She did not notice that her friend was not so often with her. The persecution having relented, the Christians were able to assemble more regularly, and the Nubian frequented these meetings assiduously. His zeal increased, and he sometimes uttered mysterious threats. He said that the rich would not keep their wealth. He went to the public places to which the poorer Christians used to resort, and assembling together all the poor wretches who were lying in the shade of the old walls, he announced to them that all slaves would soon be free, and that the day of justice was at hand.

"In the kingdom of God," he said, "the slaves will drink new wine and eat delicious fruits; whilst the rich, crouching at their feet like dogs, will devour the crumbs from their table."

These sayings were noised abroad through all that quarter of the city, and the masters feared that Ahmes might incite the slaves to revolt. The innkeeper hated him intensely, though he carefully concealed his rancour.

One day, a silver salt-cellar, reserved for the table of the gods, disappeared from the inn. Ahmes was accused of having stolen it—out of hate to his master and to the gods of the empire. There

was no proof of the accusation, and the slave vehemently denied the charge. Nevertheless, he was dragged before the tribunal, and as he had the reputation of being a bad servant, the judge condemned him to death.

"As you did not know how to make a good use of your hands," he said, "they will be nailed to the cross."

Ahmes heard the verdict quietly, bowed to the judge most respectfully, and was taken to the public prison. During the three days that remained to him, he did not cease to preach the gospel to the prisoners, and it was related afterwards that the criminals, and the gaoler himself, touched by his words, believed in Jesus crucified.

He was taken to the very place which one night, less than two years before, he had crossed so joyfully, carrying in his cloak little Thaïs, the daughter of his soul, his darling flower. When his hands were nailed to the cross, he uttered no complaint, but many times he sighed and murmured, "I thirst."

His agony lasted three days and three nights. It seemed hardly possible that human flesh could have endured such prolonged torture. Many times it was thought he was dead; the flies clustered on his eyelids, but suddenly he would reopen his bloodshot eyes. On the morning of the fourth day, he sang,

in a voice clearer and purer than that of a child—

"Tell us, Mary, what thou hast seen where thou hast been?"

Then he smiled and said—

"They come, the angels of the good Lord. They bring me wine and fruit. How refreshing is the fanning of their wings!"

And he expired.

His features preserved in death an expression of ecstatic happiness. Even the soldiers who guarded the cross were struck with wonder. Vivantius, accompanied by some of the Christian brethren, claimed the body, and buried it with the remains of the other martyrs in the crypt of St. John the Baptist, and the Church venerated the memory of Saint Theodore the Nubian.

Three years later, Constantine, the conquerer of Maxentius, issued an edict which granted toleration to the Christians, and the believers were not henceforth persecuted, except by heretics.

Thaïs had completed her eleventh year when her friend was tortured to death, and she felt deeply saddened and shocked. Her soul was not sufficiently pure to allow her to understand that the slave Ahmes was blessed both in his life and his death. The idea sprang up in her little mind that no one can be good in this world except at the cost

of the most terrible sufferings. And she was afraid to be good, for her delicate flesh could not bear pain.

At an early age, she had given herself to the lads about the port, and she followed the old men who wandered about the quarter in the evening, and with what she received from them she bought cakes and trinkets.

As she did not take home any of the money she gained, her mother continually ill-treated her. To get out of reach of her mother's arm, she often ran, bare-footed, to the city walls, and hid with the lizards. There she thought with envy of the ladies she had seen pass her, richly dressed, and in a litter surrounded by slaves.

One day, when she had been beaten more brutally than usual, she was crouching down beside the gate, motionless and sulky, when an old woman stopped in front of her, looked at her for some moments in silence, and then cried—

"Oh, the pretty flower! the beautiful child! Happy is the father who begot thee, and the mother who brought thee into the world!"

Thaïs remained silent, with her eyes fixed on the ground. Her eyelids were red, and it was evident she had been weeping.

"My white violet," continued the old woman, "is not your mother happy to have nourished a little

goddess like you, and does not your father, when he sees you, rejoice from the bottom of his heart?"

To which the child replied, as though talking to herself—

"My father is a wine-skin swollen with wine, and my mother a greedy horse-leech."

The old woman glanced to right and left, to see if she were observed. Then, in a fawning voice—

"Sweet flowering hyacinth, beautiful drinker of light, come with me, and you shall have nothing to do but dance and smile. I will feed you on honey cakes, and my son—my own son—will love you as his eyes. My son is handsome and young; he has but little beard on his chin; his skin is soft, and he is, as they say, a little Acharnian pig."

Thaïs replied—

"I am quite willing to go with you."

And she rose and followed the old woman out of the city.

The old woman, who was named Mœroë, went from city to city with a troupe of girls and boys, whom she taught to dance, and then hired out to rich people to appear at feasts.

Guessing that Thaïs would soon develop into a most beautiful woman, she taught her—with the help of a whip—music and prosody, and she flogged with leather thongs those beautiful legs, when they

did not move in time to the strains of the cithara. Her son—a decrepit abortion, of no age and no sex—ill-treated the child, on whom he vented the hate he had for all womankind. Like the dancing-girls whose grace he affected, he knew, and taught Thaïs, the art of pantomime, and how to mimic, by expression, gesture, and attitude, all human passions, and more especially the passions of love. He was a clever master, though he disliked his work; but he was jealous of his pupil, and as soon as he discovered that she was born to give men pleasure, he scratched her cheeks, pinched her arms, or pricked her legs, as a spiteful girl would have done. Thanks, however, to his lessons, she quickly became an excellent musician, pantomimist, and dancer. The brutality of her master did not at all surprise her; it seemed natural to her to be badly treated. She even felt some respect for the old woman, who knew music and drank Greek wine. Mœroë, when she came to Antioch, praised her pupil to the rich merchants of the city who gave banquets, both as a dancer and a flute-player. Thaïs danced and pleased. She accompanied the rich bankers, when they left the table, into the shady groves on the banks of the Orontes. She gave herself to all, for she knew nothing of the price of love. But one night that she had danced before the most fashionable young men of the city,

the son of the pro-consul came to her, radiant with youth and pleasure, and said, in a voice that seemed redolent of kisses—

"Why am I not, Thaïs, the wreath which crowns your hair, the tunic which enfolds your beautiful form, the sandal on your pretty foot? I wish you to tread me under foot as a sandal; I wish my caresses to be your tunic and your wreath. Come, sweet girl! come to my house, and let us forget the world."

She looked at him whilst he was speaking, and saw that he was handsome. Suddenly she felt a cold sweat on her face. She turned green as grass; she reeled; a cloud descended before her eyes. He again implored her to come with him, but she refused. His ardent looks, his burning words were vain, and when he took her in his arms to try and drag her away, she pushed him off rudely. Then he implored her, and shed tears. But a new, unknown, and invincible passion dominated her heart, and she still resisted.

"What madness!" said the guests. "Lollius is noble, handsome, and rich, and a dancing-girl treats him with scorn!"

Lollius returned home alone that night, quite love-sick. He came in the morning, pale and red-eyed, and hung flowers at the dancing-girl's door.

But Thaïs was frightened and troubled; she avoided Lollius, and yet he was continually in her mind. She suffered, and she did not know the cause of her complaint. She wondered why she had thus changed, and why she was melancholy. She recoiled from all her lovers; they were hateful to her. She loathed the light of day, and lay on her bed all day, sobbing, and with her head buried in the pillows. Lollius contrived to gain admittance, and came many times, but neither his pleadings nor his execrations had any effect on the obdurate girl. In his presence, she was as timid as a virgin, and would say nothing but—

"I will not! I will not!"

But at the end of a fortnight she gave in, for she knew that she loved him; she went to his house and lived with him. They were supremely happy. They passed their days shut up together, gazing into each other's eyes, and babbling a childish jargon. In the evening, they walked on the lonely banks of the Orontes, and lost themselves in the laurel woods. Sometimes they rose at dawn, to go and gather hyacinths on the slopes of Sulpicus. They drank from the same cup, and he would take a grape from between her lips with his mouth.

Mœroë came to Lollius, and cried and shrieked that Thaïs should be restored to her.

"She is my daughter," she said, "my daughter, who has been torn from me. My perfumed flower —my own bowels—!"

Lollius gave her a large sum of money, and sent her away. But, as she came back to demand some more gold staters, the young man had her put in prison, and the magistrates having discovered that she was guilty of many crimes, she was condemned to death, and thrown to the wild beasts.

Thaïs loved Lollius with all the passion of her mind, and the bewilderment of innocence. She told him, and told him truly from the bottom of her heart—

"I have never loved any one but you."

Lollius replied—

"You are not like any other woman."

The spell lasted six months, but it broke at last. Thaïs suddenly felt that her heart was empty and lonely. Lollius no longer seemed the same to her. She thought—

"What can have thus changed me in an instant? How is it that he is now like any other man, and no longer like himself?"

She left him, not without a secret desire to find Lollius again in another, as she no longer found him in himself. She thought it would be less dull to live with someone she had never loved, than with

one she had ceased to love. She appeared, in the company of rich debauchees, at those sacred feasts at which naked virgins danced in the temples, and troops of courtesans swam across the Orontes. She took part in all the pleasures of the fashionable and depraved city; and she assiduously frequented the theatres, at which clever mimes from all countries performed amidst the applause of a crowd greedy for excitement.

She carefully observed the mimes, dancers, comedians, and especially the women, who in tragedies represented goddesses in love with young men, or mortals loved by the gods. Having discovered the secrets by which they pleased the audience, she thought to herself that she was more beautiful and could act better. She went to the manager, and asked to be admitted into the troupe. Thanks to her beauty, and to the lessons she had received from old Mœroë, she was received, and appeared on the stage in the part of Dircé.

She met with but indifferent success, for she was inexperienced, and the admiration of the spectators had not been aroused by hearing her praises sung. But after she had played small parts for a few months, the power of her beauty burst forth with such effect that all the city was moved. All Antioch crowded to the theatre. The imperial magistrates

and the chief citizens were compelled, by the force of public opinion, to show themselves there. The porters, sweepers, and dock labourers went without bread and garlic, that they might pay for their places. Poets composed epigrams in her honour. Bearded philosophers inveighed against her in the baths and gymnasia; when her litter passed, Christian priests turned away their heads. The threshold of her door was wreathed with flowers, and sprinkled with blood. She received so much money from her lovers that it was no longer counted, but measured by the medimnus, and all the treasure hoarded by miserly old men was poured out at her feet. But she was placid and unmoved. She rejoiced, with quiet pride, in the admiration of the public and the favour of the gods, and was so much loved that she loved herself.

After she had several years enjoyed the admiration and affection of the Antiochians, she was taken with a desire to revisit Alexandria, and show her glory in that city in which, as a child, she had wandered in want and shame, hungry and lean as a grasshopper in the middle of a dusty road. The golden city joyfully welcomed her, and loaded her with fresh riches; when she appeared in the games it was a triumph. Countless admirers and lovers came to her. She received them with indifference,

for she at last despaired of meeting another Lollius.

Amongst many others, she met the philosopher Nicias, who desired to possess her, although he professed to have no desires. In spite of his riches, he was intelligent and modest. But his delicate wit and beautiful sentiments failed to charm her. She did not love him and sometimes his refined irony even irritated her. His perpetual doubts hurt her, for he believed in nothing, and she believed in everything. She believed in divine providence, in the omnipotence of evil spirits, in spells, exorcisms, and eternal justice; she believed in Jesus Christ, and in the goddess of good of the Syrians; she believed also that bitches barked when black Hecate passed through the streets, and that woman could inspire love by pouring a philtre into a cup wrapped in the bleeding skin of a sheep. She thirsted for the unknown; she called on nameless gods, and lived in perpetual expectation. The future frightened her, and yet she wished to know it. She surrounded herself with priests of Isis, Chaldean magi, pharmacopolists, and professors of the black arts, who invariably deceived her, though she never tired of being deceived. She feared death, and she saw it everywhere. When she yielded to pleasure, it seemed to her that an icy finger would suddenly touch her on the bare shoulder, and she turned pale,

and cried with terror, in the arms which embraced her.

Nicias said to her—

"What does it matter, O my Thaïs, whether we descend to eternal night with white locks and hollow cheeks, or, whether this very day, now laughing to the vast sky, shall be our last? Let us enjoy life; we shall have greatly lived if we have greatly loved. There is no knowledge except that of the senses; to love is to understand. That which we do not know does not exist. What good is it to worry ourselves about nothing?"

She replied angrily—

"I despise men like you, who hope for nothing and fear nothing. I wish to *know!* I wish to *know!*"

In order to understand the secret of life, she set to work to read the books of the philosophers, but she did not understand them. The further the years of her childhood receded from her, the more anxious she was to recall them. She loved to traverse at night, in disguise, the alleys, squares, and places where she had grown up so miserably. She was sorry she had lost her parents, and especially that she had not been able to love them. When she met any Christian priest, she thought of her baptism, and felt troubled. One night, when enveloped

in a long cloak, and her fair hair hidden under a black hood, she was wandering, according to custom, about the suburbs of the city, she found herself—without knowing how she came there—before the poor little church of St. John the Baptist. They were singing inside the church, and a bright light glimmered through the chinks of the door. There was nothing strange in that, as, for the past twenty years, the Christians, protected by the conqueror of Maxentius, had publicly solemnised their festivals. But these hymns seemed more like an ardent appeal to the soul. As if she had been invited to the mysteries, she pushed the door open with her arm, and entered the building. She found a numerous assembly of women, children, and old men, on their knees before a tomb, which stood against the wall. The tomb was nothing but a stone coffer, roughly sculptured with vine tendrils and bunches of grapes; yet it had received great honours, and was covered with green palms and wreaths of red roses. All round, innumerable lights gleamed out of the heavy shadow, in which the smoke of Arabian gums seemed like the folds of angels' robes, and the paintings on the walls visions of Paradise. Priests, clad in white, were prostrate at the foot of the sarcophagus. The hymns they sang with the people expressed the delight of suffering, and mingled, in a triumphal

mourning, so much joy with so much grief, that Thaïs, in listening to them, felt the pleasures of life and the terrors of death flowing, at the same time, through her re-awakened senses.

When they had finished singing, the believers rose, and walked in single file to the tomb, the side of which they kissed. They were common men, accustomed to work with their hands. They advanced with a heavy step, the eyes fixed, the jaw dropped, but they had an air of sincerity. They knelt down, each in turn, before the sarcophagus, and put their lips to it. The women lifted their little children in their arms, and gently placed their cheek to the stone.

Thaïs, surprised and troubled, asked a deacon why they did so.

"Do you not know, woman," replied the deacon, "that we celebrate to-day the blessed memory of St. Theodore the Nubian, who suffered for the faith in the days of the Emperor Diocletian? He lived virtuously and died a martyr, and that is why, robed in white, we bear red roses to his glorious tomb."

On hearing these words, Thaïs fell on her knees, and burst into tears. Half-forgotten recollections of Ahmes returned to her mind. On the memory of this obscure, gentle, and unfortunate man, the blaze of candles, the perfume of roses, the clouds of

incense, the music of hymns, the piety of souls, threw all the charms of glory. Thaïs thought in the dazzling glare—

"He was good, and now he has become great and glorious. Why is it that he is elevated above other men? What is this unknown thing which is more than riches or pleasure?"

She rose slowly, and turned towards the tomb of the saint who had loved her, those violet eyes, now filled with tears which glittered in the candle-light; then, with bowed head, humble, slow, and the last, with those lips on which so many desires hung, she kissed the stone of the slave's tomb.

When she returned to her house, she found Nicias, who, with his hair perfumed, and his tunic thrown open, was reading a treatise on morals whilst waiting for her. He advanced with open arms.

"Naughty Thaïs," he said, in a laughing voice, "whilst I was waiting for you to come, do you know what I saw in this manuscript, written by the gravest of Stoics? Precepts of virtue and noble maxims: No! On the staid papyrus, I saw dance thousands and thousands of little Thaïses. Each was no bigger than my finger, and yet their grace was infinite, and all were the only Thaïs. There were some who flaunted in mantles of purple and gold; others, like a white cloud, floated in the air in transparent

drapery. Others again, motionless and divinely nude, the better to inspire pleasure, expressed no thought. Lastly, there were two, hand in hand; two so alike that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. Both smiled. The first said, 'I am love.' The other, 'I am death.' "

Thus speaking, he pressed Thaïs in his arms, and not noticing the sullen look in her downcast eyes, he went on adding thought to thought, heedless of the fact that they were all lost upon her.

"Yes, when I had before my eyes the line in which it was written, 'Nothing should deter you from improving your mind,' I read, 'The kisses of Thaïs are warmer than fire, and sweeter than honey.' That is how a philosopher reads the books of other philosophers—and that is your fault, you naughty child. It is true that, as long as we are what we are, we shall never find anything but our own thoughts in the thoughts of others, and that all of us are somewhat inclined to read books as I have read this one."

She did not hear him; her soul was still before the Nubian's tomb. As he heard her sigh, he kissed her on the neck, and said—

"Do not be sad, my child. We are never happy in this world, except when we forget the world.

Come, let us cheat life—it is sure to take its revenge. Come, let us love!"

But she pushed him away.

"*We* love!" she cried bitterly. "*You* never loved any one. And *I* do not love *you!* No! I do not love you! I hate you! Go! I hate you! I curse and despise all who are happy, and all who are rich! Go! Go! Goodness is only found amongst the unfortunate. When I was a child I knew a black slave who died on the cross. He was good; he was filled with love, and he knew the secret of life. You are not worthy to wash his feet. Go! I never wish to see you again!"

She threw herself on her face on the carpet, and passed the night sobbing and weeping, and forming resolutions to live, in future, like Saint Theodore, in poverty and humbleness.

The next day, she devoted herself again to those pleasures to which she was addicted. As she knew that her beauty, though still intact, would not last very long, she hastened to derive all the enjoyment and all the fame she could from it. At the theatre, where she acted and studied more than ever, she gave life to the imagination of sculptors, painters, and poets. Recognising that there was in the attitudes, movements, and walk of the actress, an idea

of the divine harmony which rules the spheres, wise men and philosophers considered that such perfect grace was a virtue in itself, and said, "Thaïs also is a geometrician!" The ignorant, the poor, the humble, and the timid before whom she consented to appear, regarded her as a blessing from heaven. Yet she was sad amidst all the praise she received, and dreaded death more than ever. Nothing was able to set her mind at rest, not even her house and gardens, which were celebrated, and a proverb throughout the city.

The gardens were planted with trees, brought at great expense from India and Persia. They were watered by a running brook, and colonnades in ruins, and imitation rocks, arranged by a skilful artist, were reflected in a lake, which also mirrored the statues that stood round it. In the middle of the garden was the Grotto of Nymphs, which owed its name to three life-size figures of women, which stood on the threshold. They were represented as divesting themselves of their garments, and about to bathe. They anxiously turned their heads, fearing to be seen, and looked as though they were alive. The only light which entered the building came, tempered and iridescent, through thin sheets of water. All the walls were hung—as in the sacred grottoes—with wreaths, garlands, and votive pictures, in

which the beauty of Thaïs was celebrated. There were also tragic and comic masks, bright with colours; and paintings representing theatrical scenes, or grotesque figures, or fabulous animals. On a stele in the centre stood a little ivory Eros of wonderful antique workmanship. It was a gift from Nicias. In one of the bays was a figure of a goat in black marble, with shining agate eyes. Six alabaster kids crowded round its teats; but, raising its cloven hoofs and its ugly head, it seemed impatient to climb the rocks. The floor was covered with Byzantine carpets, pillows embroidered by the yellow men of Cathay, and the skins of Libyan lions. Perfumed smoke arose from golden censers. Flowering plants grew in large onyx vases. And at the far end, in the purple shadow, gleamed the gold nails on the shell of a huge Indian tortoise turned upside down, which served as the bed of the actress. It was here that every day, to the murmur of the water, and amid perfumes and flowers, Thaïs reclined softly, and conversed with her friends, while awaiting the hour of supper, or meditated in solitude on theatrical art, or on the flight of years.

On the afternoon after the games, Thaïs was reposing in the Grotto of Nymphs. She had noticed in her mirror the first signs of the decay of her beauty, and she was frightened to think that white

hair and wrinkles would at last come. She vainly tried to comfort herself with the assurance that she could recover her fresh complexion by burning certain herbs and pronouncing a few magic words. A pitiless voice cried, "You will grow old Thaïs; you will grow old." And a cold sweat of terror bedewed her forehead. Then, on looking at herself again in the mirror with infinite tenderness, she found that she was still beautiful and worthy to be loved. She smiled to herself, and murmured, "There is not a woman in Alexandria who can rival me in suppleness or grace or movement, or in splendour of arms, and the arms, my mirror, are the real chains of love!"

While she was thus thinking she saw an unknown man—thin, with burning eyes and unkempt beard, and clad in a richly embroidered robe—standing before her. She let fall her mirror, and uttered a cry of fright.

Paphnutius stood motionless, and seeing how beautiful she was, he murmured this prayer from the bottom of his heart—

"Grant, my God, that the face of this woman may not be a temptation, but may prove salutary to Thy servant."

Then, forcing himself to speak, he said—

"Thaïs, I live in a far country, and the fame of

thy beauty has led me to thee. It is said that thou art the most clever of actresses and the most irresistible of women. That which is related of thy riches and thy love affairs seems fabulous, and calls to mind the old story of Rhodope, whose marvellous history is known by heart to all the boatmen on the Nile. Therefore I was seized with a desire to know thee, and I see that the truth surpasses the rumour. Thou art a thousand times more clever and more beautiful than is reported. And now that I see thee, I say to myself, 'It is impossible to approach her without staggering like a drunken man.' "

The words were feigned; but the monk, animated by pious zeal, uttered them with real warmth. Thaïs gazed, without displeasure, at this strange being who had frightened her. The rough, wild aspect, and the fiery glances of his eyes, astonished her. She was curious to learn the state of life of a man so different from all others she had met. She replied, with gentle raillery—

"You seem prompt to admire, stranger. Beware that my looks do not consume you to the bones! Beware of loving me!"

He said—

"I love thee, O Thaïs! I love thee more than my life, and more than myself. For thee I have quitted the desert; for thee my lips—vowed to

silence—have pronounced profane words; for thee I have seen what I ought not to have seen, and heard what it was forbidden to me to hear; for thee my soul is troubled, my heart is open, and the thoughts gush out like the running springs at which the pigeons drink; for thee I have walked day and night across sandy deserts teeming with reptiles and vampires; for thee I have placed my bare foot on vipers and scorpions! Yes, I love thee! I love thee, but not like those men who, burning with the lusts of the flesh, come to thee like devouring wolves or furious bulls. Thou art dear to them as is the gazelle to the lion. Their ravening lusts will consume thee to the soul, O woman! I love thee in spirit and in truth; I love thee in God, and for ever and ever; that which is in my breast is named true zeal and divine charity. I promise thee better things than drunkenness crowned with flowers or the dreams of a brief night. I promise thee holy feasts and celestial suppers. The happiness that I bring thee will never end; it is unheard-of, it is ineffable, and such that if the happy of this world could only see a shadow of it they would die of wonder."

Thaïs laughed mischievously.

"Friend," she said, "show me this wonderful love. Make haste! Long speeches would be an

insult to my beauty; let us not lose a moment. I am impatient to taste the felicity you announce; but, to say the truth, I fear that I shall always remain ignorant of it, and that all you have promised me will vanish in words. It is easier to promise a great happiness than to give it. Everyone has a talent of some sort. I fancy that yours is to make long speeches. You speak of an unknown love. It is so long since kisses were first exchanged that it would be very extraordinary if there still remained secrets in love. On this subject lovers knew more than philosophers."

"Do not jest, Thaïs. I bring thee the unknown love."

"Friend, you come too late. I know every kind of love."

"The love that I bring thee abounds with glory, whilst the loves that thou knowest breed only shame."

Thaïs looked at him with an angry eye, a frown gathered on her beautiful face.

"You are very bold, stranger, to offend your hostess. Look at me, and say if I resemble a creature crushed down with shame. No, I am not ashamed, and all others who live like me are not ashamed either, although they are not so beautiful or so rich as I am. I have sown pleasure in my

footsteps, and I am celebrated for that all over the world. I am more powerful than the masters of the world. I have seen them at my feet. Look at me, look at these little feet; thousands of men would pay with their blood for the happiness of kissing them. I am not very big, and I do not occupy much space on the earth. To those who look at me from the top of the Serapeium, when I pass in the street, I look like a grain of rice; but that grain of rice has caused among men, griefs, despairs, hates, and crimes enough to have filled Tartarus. Are you not mad to talk to me of shame when all around proclaims my glory?"

"That which is glory in the eyes of men, is infamy before God. O woman, we have been nourished in countries so different, that it is not surprising we have neither the same language nor the same thoughts! Yet Heaven is my witness that I wish to agree with thee, and that it is my intention not to leave thee until we share the same sentiments. Who will inspire me with burning words that will melt thee like wax in my breath, O woman, that the fingers of my desires may mould thee as they wish? What virtue will deliver thee to me, O dearest of souls, that the spirit which animates me, creating thee a second time, may imprint on thee a fresh beauty, and that thou mayest cry, weeping for joy,

'It is only now that I am born'? Who will cause to gush in my heart a fount of Siloam, in which thou mayest bathe and recover thy first purity? Who will change me into a Jordan, the waves of which sprinkled on thee, will give thee life eternal?"

Thaïs was no longer angry.

"This man," she thought, "talks of life eternal, and all that he says seems written on a talisman. No doubt he is a mage, and knows secret charms against old age and death," and she resolved to offer herself to him. Therefore, pretending to be afraid of him, she retired a few steps to the end of the grotto, and sitting down on the edge of the bed, artfully pulled her tunic across her breast; then, motionless and mute and her eyes cast down, she waited. Her long eyelashes made a soft shadow on her cheeks. Her entire attitude expressed modesty; her naked feet swung gently, and she looked like a child sitting thinking on the bank of a brook.

But Paphnutius looked at her, and did not move. His trembling knees hardly supported him, his tongue dried in his mouth, a terrible buzzing rang in his ears. But all at once his sight failed, and he could see nothing before him but a thick cloud. He thought that the hand of Jesus had been laid on his eyes, to hide this woman from them. Reassured by such succour, strengthened and fortified, he

said with a gravity worthy of an old hermit of the desert—

"If thou givest thyself to me, thinkest thou it is hidden from God?"

She shook her head.

"God? Who forces Him to keep His eye always upon the Grotto of Nymphs? Let Him go away if we offend Him! But why should we offend Him? Since He has created us, He can be neither angry nor surprised to see us as He made us, and acting according to the nature He has given us. A good deal too much is said on His behalf, and He is often credited with ideas He never had. You yourself, stranger, do you know His true character? Who are you that you should speak to me in His name?"

At this question the monk, opening his borrowed robe, showed the cassock, and said—

"I am Paphnutius, Abbot of Antinoë, and I come from the holy desert. The hand that drew Abraham from Chaldæa and Lot from Sodom has separated me from the present age. I no longer existed for the men of this century. But thy image appeared to me in my sandy Jerusalem, and I knew that thou wert full of corruption, and death was in thee. And now I am before thee, woman, as before a grave, and I cry unto thee, 'Thaïs, arise!' "

At the words, Paphnutius, monk, and abbot, she had turned pale with fright. And now, with dishevelled hair and joined hands, weeping and groaning, she dragged herself to the feet of the saint.

"Do not hurt me! Why have you come? What do you want of me? Do not hurt me! I know that the saints of the desert hate women who, like me, are made to please. I am afraid that you hate me, and want to hurt me. Go! I do not doubt your power. But know, Paphnutius, that you should neither despise me nor hate me. I have never, like many of the men I know, laughed at your voluntary poverty. In your turn, do not make a crime of my riches. I am beautiful, and clever in acting. I no more chose my condition than my nature. I was made for that which I do. I was born to charm men. And you yourself, did you not say just now that you loved me? Do not use your science against me. Do not pronounce magic words which would destroy my beauty, or change me into a statue of salt. Do not terrify me! I am already too frightened. Do not kill me! I am so afraid of death."

He made a sign to her to rise, and said—

"Child, have no fear. I will utter no word of shame or scorn. I come on behalf of Him who sat on the edge of the well, and drank of the pitcher

which the woman of Samaria offered to Him; and who, also, when He supped at the house of Simon, received the perfumes of Mary. I am not without sin that I should throw the first stone. I have often badly employed the abundant grace which God has bestowed upon me. It was not anger, but pity, which took me by the hand to conduct me here. I can, without deceit, address thee in words of love, for it is the zeal in my heart which has brought me to thee. I burn with the fire of charity, and if thy eyes, accustomed only to the gross sights of the flesh, could see things in their mystic aspect, I should appear unto thee as a branch broken off the burning bush which the Lord showed on the mountain to Moses of old, that he might understand true love —that which envelops us, and which, so far from leaving behind it mere coals and ashes, purifies and perfumes for ever that which it penetrates."

"I believe you, monk, and no longer fear either deceit or ill-will from you. I have often heard talk of the hermits of the Thebaid. Marvellous things have been told concerning Anthony and Paul. Your name is not unknown to me, and I have heard say that, though you are still young, you equal in virtue the oldest anchorites. As soon as I saw you, and without knowing who you were, I felt that you were no ordinary man. Tell me! can you do for me

that which neither the priests of Isis, nor of Hermes, nor of the celestial Juno, nor the Chaldean soothsayers, nor the Babylonian magi have been able to effect? Monk, if you love me, can you prevent me from dying?"

"Woman, whosoever wishes to live shall live. Flee from the abominable delights in which thou diest for ever. Snatch from the devils, who will burn it most horribly, that body which God kneaded with His spittle and animated with his own breath. Thou art consumed with weariness; come, and refresh thyself at the blessed springs of solitude; come and drink of those fountains which are hidden in the desert, and which gush forth to heaven. Careworn soul, come, and possess that which thou desirest! Heart greedy for joy, come and taste true joys—poverty, retirement, self-forgetfulness, seclusion in the bosom of God. Enemy of Christ now, and to-morrow His well-beloved, come to Him! Come, thou whom I have sought, and thou wilt say, 'I have found love!' "

Thaïs seemed lost in meditation on things afar.

"Monk," she asked, "if I adjure all pleasures and do penance, is it true that I shall be born again in heaven, my body intact in all its beauty?"

"Thaïs, I bring thee eternal life. Believe me, for that which I announce to thee is the truth."

"Who will assure me that it is the truth?"

"David and the prophets, the Scriptures, and the wonders that thou shalt behold."

"Monk, I should like to believe you, for I must confess that I have not found happiness in this world. My lot in life is better than that of a queen, and yet I have many bitternesses and misfortunes, and I am infinitely weary of my existence. All women envy me, and yet sometimes I have envied the lot of a toothless old woman who, when I was a child, sold honey-cakes under one of the city gates. Often has the idea flashed across my mind that only the poor are good, happy, and blessed, and that there must be great gladness in living humble and obscure. Monk, you have agitated a storm in my soul, and brought to the surface that which lay at the bottom. Who am I to believe, alas! and what is to become of me—and what is life?"

Whilst she thus spoke, Paphnutius was transfigured; celestial joy beamed in his face.

"Listen!" he said. "I was not alone when I entered this house. Another accompanied me, another who stands by my side. Him thou canst not see, because thy eyes are yet unworthy to behold Him; but soon thou shalt see Him in all His glorious splendour, and thou wilt say, 'He alone is to be adored.' But now, if He had not placed His gentle

hands before my eyes, O Thaïs, I should perhaps have fallen into sin with thee, for of myself I am but weak and sinful. But He saved us both. He is as good as He is powerful, and His name is the Saviour. He was promised to the world, by David and the prophets, worshipped in His cradle by the shepherds and the magi, crucified by the Pharisees, buried by the holy women, revealed to the world by the apostles, testified to by the martyrs. And now, having learned that thou fearest death, O woman, He has come to thy house to prevent thee from dying. Art Thou not here present with me, Jesus, at this moment, as Thou didst appear to the men of Galilee, in those wonderful days when the stars, which came down with thee from heaven, were so near the earth that the holy innocents could take them in their hands, when they played in their mothers' arms on the terraces of Bethlehem? Is it not true, Jesus, that Thou art here present, and that Thou showest me in reality Thy precious body? Is not Thy face here, and that tear which flows down Thy cheek a real tear? Yes, the angel of eternal justice shall receive it, and it shall be the ransom of the soul of Thaïs. Art Thou not here, Jesus? Jesus, Thy loving lips open. Thou canst speak; speak, I hear Thee! And thee, Thaïs, happy Thaïs! listen to what the Saviour Himself says to

thee; it is He who speaks, not I. He says, 'I have sought thee long, O my lost sheep! I have found thee at last! Fly from Me no more. Let me take thee by the hands, poor little one, and I will bear thee on My shoulders to the heavenly fold. Come, my Thaïs! come, my chosen one! come, and weep with Me!' "

And Paphnutius fell on his knees, his eyes filled with ecstasy. And then Thaïs saw in his face the likeness of the living Christ.

"O vanished days of my childhood!" she sobbed. "O sweet father Ahmes! good Saint Theodore, why did I not die in thy white mantle whilst thou didst bear me, in the first dawn of day, yet fresh from the waters of baptism!"

Paphnutius advanced towards her, crying—

"Thou art baptised! O divine wisdom! O Providence! O great God! I know now the power which drew me to thee. I know what rendered thee so dear and so beautiful in my eyes. It was the virtue of the baptismal water, which made me leave the shadow of God, where I lived, to seek thee in the poisoned air where men dwell. A drop—a drop, no doubt, of the water which washed thy body—has been sprinkled in my face. Come, O my sister, and receive from thy brother the kiss of peace."

And the monk touched with his lips the forehead of the courtesan.

Then he was silent, letting God speak, and nothing was heard in the Grotto of Nymphs but the sobs of Thaïs, mingled with the rippling of the running water.

She wept without trying to stop her tears, when two black slaves appeared, loaded with stuffs, perfumes, and garlands.

"It was hardly the right time to weep," she said, trying to smile. "Tears redden the eyes and spoil the complexion, and I must sup to-night with some friends, and want to be beautiful, for there will be women there quick to spy out marks of care on my face. These slaves come to dress me. Withdraw, my father, and allow them to do their work. They are clever and experienced, and I pay them well for their services. You see that one who wears thick rings of gold, and shows such white teeth. I took her from the wife of the pro-consul."

Paphnutius had at first a thought of dissuading Thaïs, as earnestly as he could, from going to this supper. But he determined to act prudently, and asked what persons she would meet there.

She replied that there would be the host, old Cotta, the Prefect of the Fleet, Nicias, and several other philosophers who loved an argument, the poet

Callicrates, the high priest of Serapis, some young men whose chief amusement was training horses, and lastly some women, of whom there was little to be said except that they were young. Then, by a supernatural inspiration—

"Go amongst them, Thaïs," said the monk. "Go! But I will not leave thee. I will go with thee to this banquet, and will remain by thy side without saying a word."

She burst out laughing. And whilst her two black slaves were busy dressing her, she cried—

"What will they say when they see that I have a monk of the Thebaid for my lover?"

THE BANQUET

HEN, followed by Paphnutius, Thaïs entered the banqueting-room, the guests were already, for the most part, assembled, and reclining on their couches before the horseshoe table, which was covered with glittering vessels. In the centre of the table stood a silver basin, surmounted by four figures of satyrs, who poured out from wine-skins on the boiled fish a kind of pickle in which they floated. When Thaïs appeared, acclamations arose from all sides.

Greetings to the sister of the Graces!

To the silent Melpomene, who can express all things with her looks!

Salutation to the well-beloved of gods and men!

To the much desired!

To her who gives suffering and its cure!

To the pearl of Racotis!

To the rose of Alexandria!

She waited impatiently till this torrent of praise had passed, and then said to Cotta, the host—

"Lucius, I have brought you a monk of the desert,

Paphnutius, the Abbot of Antinoë. He is a great saint, whose words burn like fire."

Lucius Aurelius Cotta, the Prefect of the Fleet, rose, and replied—

"You are welcome, Paphnutius, you who profess the Christian faith. I myself have some respect of a religion that has now become imperial. The divine Constantine has placed your co-religionists in the front rank of the friends of the empire. Latin wisdom ought, in fact, to admit your Christ into our pantheon. It was a maxim of our forefathers that there was something divine in every god. But no more of that. Let us drink and enjoy ourselves while there is yet time."

Old Cotta spoke tranquilly. He had just studied a new model for a galley, and had finished the sixth book of his history of the Carthaginians. He felt sure he had not lost his day, and was satisfied with himself and the gods.

"Paphnutius," he added, "you see here several men who are worthy to be loved—Hermodorus, the High Priest of Serapis; the philosophers Dorion, Nicias, and Zenothemis; the poet Callicrates; young Chereas and young Aristobulus, both sons of dear old comrades; and near them Philina and Drosea, who deserve to be praised for their beauty."

Nicias embraced Paphnutius, and whispered in his ear—

"I warned you, brother, that Venus was powerful. It is her gentle force that has brought you here in spite of yourself. Listen: you are a man full of piety, but if you do not confess that she is the mother of the gods, your ruin is certain. Do you know that the old mathematician, Melanthes, used to say, 'I cannot demonstrate the properties of a triangle without the aid of Venus'?"

Dorion, who had for some seconds been looking at the new-comer, suddenly clapped his hands and uttered a cry of surprise.

"It is he, friends! His look, his beard, his tunic —it is he himself! I met him at the theatre whilst our Thaïs was acting. He was furiously excited, and spoke with violence, as I can testify. He is an honest man, but he will abuse us all; his eloquence is terrible. If Marcus is the Plato of the Christians, Paphnutius is the Demosthenes. Epicurus, in his little garden, never heard the like."

Philina and Drosea, however, devoured Thaïs with their eyes. She wore on her fair hair a wreath of pale violets, each flower of which recalled, in a paler hue, the colour of her eyes, so that the flowers looked like softened glances, and the eyes like spar-

kling flowers. It was the peculiar gift of this woman; on her everything lived, and was soul and harmony. Her robe, which was of mauve spangled with silver, trailed in long folds with a grace that was almost melancholy and was not relieved by either bracelets or necklaces. The chief charm of her appearance was her beautiful bare arms. The two friends were obliged to admire, in spite of themselves the robe and head-dress of Thaïs, though they said nothing to her on the subject.

"How beautiful you are!" said Philina. "You could not have been more so when you came to Alexandria. Yet my mother, who remembers seeing you then, says there were few women who were worthy to be compared with you."

"Who is the new lover you have brought?" asked Drosea. "He has a strange, wild appearance. If there are shepherds of elephants, assuredly he must resemble one. Where did you find such a wild-looking friend, Thaïs? Was it amongst the troglodytes who live under the earth, and are grimy with the smoke of Hades?"

But Philina put her finger on Drosea's lips.

"Hush! the mysteries of love must remain secret, and it is forbidden to know them. For my own part, certainly, I would rather be kissed by the mouth of smoking Etna than by the lips of that

man. But our dear Thaïs, who is beautiful and adorable as the goddesses, should, like the goddesses, grant all requests, and not, like us, only those of nice young men."

"Take care, both of you!" replied Thaïs. "He is a mage and an enchanter. He hears words that are whispered, and even thoughts. He will tear out your heart while you are asleep, and put a sponge in its place, and the next day, when you drink water, you will be choked to death."

She watched them grow pale, then she turned away from them, and sat on a couch by the side of Paphnutius. The voice of Cotta, kind but imperious, was suddenly heard above the murmur of conversation.

"Friends, let each take his place! Slaves, pour out the honeyed wine!"

Then, the host raising his cup—

"Let us first drink to the divine Constantine and the genius of the empire. The country should be put first of all, even above the gods, for it contains them all."

All the guests raised their full cups to their lips. Paphnutius alone did not drink, because Constantine had persecuted the Nicæan faith, and because the country of the Christian is not of this world.

Dorion, having drunk, murmured—

"What is one's country? A flowing river. The shores change, and the waves are incessantly renewed."

"I know, Dorion," replied the Prefect of the Fleet, "that you care little for the civic virtues, and you think that the sage ought to hold himself aloof from all affairs. I think, on the contrary, that an honest man should desire nothing better than to fill a responsible post in the State. The State is a noble thing."

Hermodorus, the High Priest of Serapis, spoke next—

"Dorion has asked, 'What is one's country?' I will reply that the altars of the gods and the tombs of ancestors make one's country. A man is a fellow-citizen by association of memories and hopes."

Young Aristobulus interrupted Hermodorus.

"By Castor! I saw a splendid horse to-day. It belonged to Demophoon. It has a fine head, small jaw, and strong forelegs. It carries its neck high and proud, like a cock."

But young Chereas shook his head.

"It is not such a good horse as you say, Aristobulus. Its hoofs are thin, and the pasterns are too low; the animal will soon go lame."

They were continuing their dispute, when Drosea uttered a piercing shriek.

"Oh! I nearly swallowed a fish-bone, as long and much sharper than a style. Luckily, I was able to get it out of my throat in time! The gods love me!"

"Did you say, Drosea, that the gods loved you?" asked Nicias, smiling. "Then they must share the same infirmities as men. Love presupposes unhappiness on the part of whoever suffers from it, and is a proof of weakness. The affection they feel for Drosea is a great proof of the imperfection of the gods."

At these words Drosea flew into a great rage.

"Nicias, your remarks are foolish and not to the point. But that is your character—you never understand what is said, and reply in words devoid of sense."

Nicias smiled again.

"Talk away, talk away, Drosea. Whatever you say, we are glad every time you open your mouth. Your teeth are so pretty!"

At that moment, a grave-looking old man, negligently dressed, walking slowly, with his head high, entered the room, and gazed at the guests quietly. Cotta made a sign to him to take a place by his side, on the same couch.

"Eucrites," he said, "you are welcome. Have you composed a new treatise on philosophy this month? That would make, if I calculate correctly, the ninety-second that has proceeded from the Nile reed you direct with an Attic hand."

Eucrites replied, stroking his silver beard—

"The nightingale was created to sing, and I was created to praise the immortal gods."

DORION. Let us respectfully salute, in Eucrites, the last of the stoics. Grave and white, he stands in the midst of us like the image of an ancestor. He is solitary amidst a crowd of men, and the words he utters are not heard.

EUCRITES. You deceive yourself, Dorion. The philosophy of virtue is not dead. I have numerous disciples in Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople. Many of the slaves, and some of the nephews of Cæsar, now know how to govern themselves, to live independently, and being unconcerned with all affairs, they enjoy boundless happiness. Many of them have revived, in their own person, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. But if it were true that virtue were for ever extinguished upon the earth, in what way would the loss of it affect my happiness, since it did not depend on me whether it existed or perished? Only fools, Dorion, place their happi-

ness out of their own power. I desire nothing that the gods do not wish, and I desire all that they do wish. By that means I render myself like unto them, and share their infallible content. If virtue perishes, I consent that it should perish, and that consent fills me with joy, as the supreme effort of my reason or my courage. In all things my wisdom will copy the divine wisdom, and the copy will be more valuable than the model; it will have cost greater care and more work.

NICIAS. I understand. You put yourself on the same level as divine providence. But if virtue consists only in effort, Eucrites, and in that intense application by which the disciples of Zeno pretend to render themselves equal to the gods, the frog, which swelled itself out to try and become as big as the ox, accomplished a masterpiece of stoicism.

EUCRITES. You jest, Nicias, and, as usual, you excel in ridicule. But if the ox of which you speak is really a god, like Apis, or like that subterranean ox whose high priest I see here, and if the frog, being wisely inspired, succeed in equalling it, would it not be, in fact, more virtuous than the ox, and could you refrain from admiring such a courageous little animal!

Four servants placed on the table a wild pig, still

covered with its bristles. Little pigs, made of pastry, surrounded the animal, as though they would suckle, to show that it was a sow.

Zenothemis, turning towards the monk, said—

"Friends, a guest has come hither to join us. The illustrious Paphnutius, who leads such an extraordinary life of solitude, is our unexpected guest."

COTTA. You may even add, Zenothemis, that the place of honour is due to him, because he came without being invited.

ZENOTHEMIS. Therefore, we ought, my dear Lucius, to make him the more welcome, and strive to do that which would be most agreeable to him. Now it is certain that such a man cares less for the fumes of meat than for the perfumes of fine thoughts. We shall, doubtless, please him by discussing the doctrine he professes, which is that of Jesus crucified. For my own part, I shall the more willingly discuss this doctrine, because it keenly interests me, on account of the number and the diversity of the allegories it contains. If one may guess at the spirit by the letter, it is filled with truths, and I consider that the Christian books abound in divine revelations. But I should not, Paphnutius, grant equal merit to the Jewish books. They were inspired not, as it was said, by the Spirit of God, but

by an evil genius. Iaveh, who dictated them, was one of those spirits who people the lower air, and cause the greater part of the evils, from which we suffer; but he surpassed all the others in ignorance and ferocity. On the contrary, the serpent with golden wings, which twined its azure coils round the tree of knowledge, was made up of light and love. A combat between these two powers—the one of light and the other of darkness—was, therefore, inevitable. It occurred soon after the creation of the world. God had hardly begun to rest after His labours; Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman, lived happy and naked in the Garden of Eden, when Iaveh conceived—to their misfortune—the design of governing them and all the generations which Eve already bore in her splendid loins. As he possessed neither the compass nor the lyre, and was equally ignorant of the science which commands and the art which persuades, he frightened these two poor children by hideous apparitions, capricious threats, and thunder-bolts. Adam and Eve, feeling his shadow upon them, pressed closer to one another, and their love waxed stronger in fear. The serpent took pity on them, and determined to instruct them, in order that, possessing knowledge, they might no longer be misled by lies. Such an undertaking required extreme pru-

dence, and the frailty of the first human couple rendered it almost hopeless. The well-intentioned demon essayed it, however. Without the knowledge of Iaveh—who pretended to see everything, but, in reality, was not very sharp-sighted—he approached these two beings, and charmed their eyes by the splendour of his coat and the brilliancy of his wings. Then he interested their minds by forming before them, with his body, definite figures, such as the circle, the ellipse, and the spiral, the wonderful properties of which have since been recognised by the Greeks. Adam meditated on these figures more than Eve did. But when the serpent began to speak, and taught the most sublime truths—those which cannot be demonstrated—he found that Adam being made of red earth, was of too dull a nature to understand these subtle distinctions, but that Eve, on the contrary, being more tender and more sensitive, was easily impressed. Therefore he conversed with her alone, in the absence of her husband, in order to initiate her first—

Dorion. Permit me, Zenothemis, to interrupt you. I speedily recognised in the myth you have explained to us an episode in the war of Pallas Athene against the giants. Iaveh much resembles Typhoon, and Pallas is represented by the Athenians with a serpent at her side. But what you have

said causes me considerable doubt as to the intelligence or good faith of the serpent of whom you have spoken. If he had really possessed knowledge, would he have entrusted it to a woman's little head, which was incapable of containing it? I should rather consider that he was like Iaveh, ignorant and a liar, and that he chose Eve because she was easily seduced, and he imagined that Adam would have more intelligence and perception.

ZENOTHEMIS. Learn, Dorion, that it is not by perception and intelligence, but by sensibility, that the highest and purest truths are reached. That is why women, who, generally, are less reflective but more sensitive than men, rise more easily to the knowledge of things divine. In them is the gift of prophecy, and it is not without reason that Apollo Citharedes, and Jesus of Nazareth, are sometimes represented clad, like women, in flowing robes. The initiator was therefore wise—whatever you may say to the contrary, Dorion—in bestowing light, not on the duller Adam, but on Eve, who was whiter than milk or the stars. She freely listened to him, and allowed herself to be led to the tree of knowledge, the branches of which rose to heaven, and which was bathed with the divine spirit as with a dew. This tree was covered with leaves which spoke all the languages of future races of

men, and their united voices formed a perfect harmony. Its abundant fruit gave to the initiated who tasted it the knowledge of metals, stones, and plants, and also of physical and moral laws; but this fruit was like fire, and those who feared suffering and death did not dare to put it to their lips. Now, as she had listened attentively to the lessons of the serpent, Eve despised these empty terrors, and wished to taste the fruit which gave the knowledge of God. But, as she loved Adam, and did not wish him to be inferior to her, she took him by the hand and led him to the wonderful tree. Then she picked one of the burning apples, bit it, and proffered it to her companion. Unfortunately, Iaveh, who was by chance walking in the garden, surprised them, and seeing that they had become wise, he fell into a most ungovernable rage. It is in his jealous fits that he is most to be feared. Assembling all his forces, he created such a turmoil in the lower air that these two weak beings were terrified. The fruit fell from the man's hand, and the woman, clinging to the neck of her luckless husband, said, "I too will be ignorant and suffer with him." The triumphant Iaveh kept Adam and Eve and all their seed in a condition of hebetude and terror. His art, which consisted only in being able to make huge meteors, triumphed over the science

of the serpent, who was a musician and geometrician. He made men unjust, ignorant, and cruel, and caused evil to reign in the earth. He persecuted Cain and his sons because they were skilful workmen; he exterminated the Philistines because they composed Orphic poems and fables like those of Æsop. He was the implacable enemy of science and beauty, and for long ages the human race expiated, in blood and tears, the defeat of the winged serpent. Fortunately, there arose among the Greeks learned men, such as Pythagoras, and Plato, who recovered by the force of genius, the figures and the ideas which the enemy of Iaveh had vainly tried to teach the first woman. The soul of the serpent was in them; and that is why the serpent, as Dorion has said, is honoured by the Athenians. Finally, in these latter days, there appeared, under human form, three celestial spirits—Jesus of Galilee, Basilides, and Valentinus—to whom it was given to pluck the finest fruits of that tree of knowledge, whose roots pass through all the earth, and whose top reaches to the highest heaven. I have said all this in vindication of the Christians, to whom the errors of the Jews are too often imputed.

DORION. If I understood you aright, Zenothemis, you said that three wonderful men—Jesus, Basilides, and Valentinus—had discovered secrets

which had remained hidden from Pythagoras and Plato, and all the philosophers of Greece, and even from the divine Epicurus, who, however, has freed men from the dread of empty terrors. You would greatly oblige me by telling me by what means these three mortals acquired knowledge which had eluded the most contemplative sages.

ZENOTHEMIS. Must I repeat to you, Dorion, that science and cogitation are but the first steps to knowledge, and that ecstasy alone leads to eternal truth?

HERMODORUS. It is true, Zenothemis, that the soul is nourished on ecstasy, as the cicada is nourished on dew. But we may even say more: the mind alone is capable of perfect rapture. For man is of a threefold nature, composed of material body, of a soul which is more subtle, but also material, and of an incorruptible mind. When, emerging from the body as from a palace suddenly given over to silence and solitude and flying through the gardens of the soul, the mind diffuses itself in God, it tastes the delights of an anticipated death, or rather of a future life, for to die is to live; and in that condition, partaking of divine purity, it possesses both infinite joy and complete knowledge. It enters into the unity which is All. It is perfected.

NICIAS. That is very fine; but, to say the truth,

Hermodorus, I do not see much difference between All and Nothing. Words even seem to fail to make the distinction. Infinity is terribly like nothingness—they are both inconceivable to the mind. In my opinion perfection costs too dear; we pay for it with all our being, and to possess it must cease to exist. That is a calamity from which God Himself is not free, for the philosophers are doing their best to perfect Him. After all, if we do not know what it is *not* to be, we are equally ignorant what it is to *be*. We know nothing. It is said that it is impossible for men to agree on this question. I believe —in spite of our noisy disputes—that it is, on the contrary, impossible for men not to become some day all at unity buried under the mass of contradictions, a Pelion on Ossa, which they themselves have raised.

COTTA. I am very fond of philosophy, and study it in my leisure time. But I never understand it well, except in Cicero's books. Slaves, pour out the honeyed wine!

CALLICRATES. It is a singular thing, but when I am hungry I think of the time when the tragic poets sat at the boards of good tyrants, and my mouth waters. But when I have tasted the excellent wine that you give us so abundantly, generous Lucius, I dream of nothing but civil wars and heroic com-

bats. I blush to live in such inglorious times; I invoke the goddess of Liberty; and I pour out my blood—in imagination—with the last Romans on the field of Philippi.

COTTA. In the days of the decline of the Republic my ancestors died with Brutus—for liberty. But there is reason to suspect that what the Roman people called liberty was only in reality the right to govern themselves. I do not deny that liberty is the greatest boon a nation can have. But the longer I live the more I am persuaded that only a strong government can bestow it on the citizens. For forty years I have filled high positions in the State, and my long experience has shown me that when the ruling power is weak the people are oppressed. Those, therefore, who—like the great majority of rhetoricians—try to weaken the government, commit an abominable crime. An autocrat, who governs by his single will, may sometimes cause most deplorable results; but if he governs by popular consent there is no remedy possible. Before the majesty of the Roman arms had bestowed peace upon all the world, the only nations which were happy were those which were ruled over by intelligent despots.

HERMODORUS. For my part, Lucius, I believe that there is no such thing as a good form of govern-

ment, and that we shall never discover one, because the Greeks, who had so many excellent ideas, were never able to find one. In that respect, therefore, all hope of ultimate success is taken from us. Unmistakable signs show that the world is about to fall into ignorance and barbarism. It has been our lot, Lucius, to witness terrible events. If all the mental satisfactions which intelligence, learning, and virtue can give, all that remains is the cruel pleasure of watching ourselves die.

COTTA. It is true that the rapacity of the people, and the boldness of the barbarians, are threatening evils. But with a good fleet, a good army, and plenty of money—

HERMODORUS. What is the use of deceiving ourselves? The dying empire will become an easy prey to the barbarians. Cities which were built by Hellenic genius, or Latin patience, will soon be sacked by drunken savages. Neither art nor philosophy will exist any longer on the earth. The statues of the gods will be overturned in the temples, and in men's hearts as well. Darkness will overcome all minds, and the world will die. Can we believe that the Sarmatians will ever devote themselves to intelligent work, that the Germani will cultivate music and philosophy, and that the Quadi and the Marcomani will adore the immortal gods?

No! we are sliding toward the abyss. Our old Egypt, which was the cradle of the world, will be its burial vault; Serapis, the god of Death, will receive the last adoration of mortals, and I shall have been the last priest of the last god.

At this moment a strange figure raised the tapestry, and the guests saw before them a little hunchback, whose bald skull rose in a point. He was clad, in the Asiatic fashion, in a blue tunic, and wore round his legs, like the barbarians, red breeches, spangled with gold stars. On seeing him, Paphnutius recognised Marcus the Arian, and fearing lest a thunderbolt should fall from heaven, he covered his head with his arms, and grew pale with fright. At this banquet of the demons, neither the blasphemies of the pagans, nor the horrible errors of the philosophers, had had any effect on him, but the mere presence of the heretic quenched his courage. He would have fled, but his eyes met those of Thaïs, and he felt at once strengthened. He read in her soul that she, who was predestined to become a saint, already protected him. He seized the skirt of her long, flowing robe, and inwardly prayed to the Saviour Jesus.

A murmur of acclamation welcomed the arrival of the personage who had been called the Christian Plato. Hermodorus was the first to speak.

"Most illustrious Marcus, we rejoice to see you amongst us, and it may be said that you come at the right moment. We know nothing of the Christian doctrine, beyond what is publicly taught. Now, it is certain that a philosopher, like you, cannot think as the vulgar think, and we are curious to know your opinion of the principal mysteries of the religion you profess. Our dear friend, Zenothemis, who, as you know, is always hunting for symbolic meanings, just now questioned the illustrious Paphnutius concerning the Jewish books. But Paphnutius made no reply, and we should not be surprised at that, as our guest has made a vow of silence, and God has sealed his tongue in the desert. But you Marcus, who have spoken at the Christian synods, and even at the councils of the divine Constantine, can if you wish, satisfy our curiosity by revealing to us the philosophic truths which are wrapped up in the Christian fables. Is not the first of these truths the existence of an only God—in whom, for my part, I fervently believe?"

MARCUS. Yes, venerable brethren, I believe in an only God, not begotten—the only Eternal, the origin of all things.

NICIAS. We know, Marcus, that your God created the world. That must certainly have been a great crisis in His existence. He had already ex-

isted an eternity before He could make up His mind to it. But I must, in justice, confess that His situation was a most difficult one. He must continue inactive if He would remain perfect, and must act if He would prove to Himself His own existence. You assure me that He decided to act. I am willing to believe you, although it was an unpardonable imprudence on the part of a perfect God. But tell us, Marcus, how He set about making the world.

MARCUS. Those who, without being Christians, possess, like Hermodorus and Zenothemis, the principles of knowledge, are aware that God did not create the world personally without an intermediary. He gave birth to an only Son, by whom all things were made.

HERMODORUS. That is quite true, Marcus; and this Son is worshipped under the various names of Hermes, Mithra, Adonis, Apollo, and Jesus.

MARCUS. I should not be a Christian if I gave Him any other names than those of Jesus Christ, and Saviour. He is the true Son of God. But He is not eternal, since He had a beginning; as to thinking that He existed before He was begotten, we must leave that absurdity to the Nicæan mules, and the obstinate ass who too long governed the Church of Alexandria under the accursed name of Athanasius.

At these words Paphnutius, white with horror and his face bedewed with the sweat of agony, made the sign of the cross, but maintained a sublime silence.

Marcus continued—

"It is clear that the foolish Nicene Creed is a treason against the majesty of the only God, by compelling Him to share His indivisible attributes with His own emanation—the Mediator by whom all things were made. Cease jesting at the true God of the Christians, Nicias, and learn that, like the lilies of the field, He toils not, neither does He spin. It was not He who was the worker, it was His only Son, Jesus, who, having created the world, came afterwards to repair His handiwork. For the creation could not be perfect, and evil was necessarily mingled with good.

NICIAS. What is "good," and what is "evil"?

There was a moment's silence, during which Hermodorus, his arm extended on the cloth, pointed to a little ass in Corinthian metal which bore two baskets—the one containing white olives, the other black olives.

"You see these olives," he said. "The contrast between the colours is pleasant to the eye, and we are content that these should be light and those should be dark. But, if they were endowed with

thought and knowledge, the white would say, It is good for an olive to be white, it is bad for it to be black; and the black olives would hate the white olives. We judge better, for we are as much above them as the gods are above us. For man, who only sees a part of things, evil is an evil; for God, who understands all things, evil is a good. Doubtless ugliness is ugly, and not beautiful; but if all were beautiful, the whole would not be beautiful. It is, then, well that there should be evil, as the second Plato, far greater than the first, has demonstrated."

EUCRITES. Let us talk more morally. Evil is an evil—not for the world, of which it cannot destroy the indestructible harmony but for the sinner who does it, and cannot help doing it.

COTTA. By Jupiter! that is a good argument.

EUCRITES. The world is a tragedy by an excellent poet. God, who composed it, has intended each of us to play a part in it. If he wills that you shall be a beggar, a prince, or a cripple, make the best of the part assigned you.

NICIAS. Assuredly it would be well that the cripple should limp like Hephaistos: it would be well that the madman should indulge in all the fury of Ajax, that the incestuous woman should repeat the crimes of Phædra, that the traitor should betray, that the rascal should lie, and the murderer

kill, and when the piece was played, all the actors —kings, just men, bloody tyrants, pious virgins, immodest wives, noble-minded citizens, and cowardly assassins—should receive from the poet an equal share in the felicitations.

EUCRITES. You distort my thought, Nicias, and change a beautiful young girl into a hideous Gorgon. I am sorry for you, if you are so ignorant of the nature of the gods, of justice, and of the eternal laws.

ZENOTHEMIS. For my part, friends, I believe in the reality of good and evil. But I am convinced that there is not a single human action—were it even the kiss of Judas—which does not bear within itself the germ of redemption. Evil contributes to the ultimate salvation of men, and, in that respect, issues from Good, and shares the merits belonging to Good. This has been admirably expressed by the Christians, in the myth concerning the man with red hair, who, in order to betray his master, gave him the kiss of peace, and by such act assured the salvation of men. Therefore, nothing is, in my opinion, more unjust and absurd than the hate with which certain disciples of Paul, the tentmaker, pursue the most unfortunate of the apostles of Jesus; without realising that the kiss of Iscariot—prophesied by Jesus Himself—was necessary, according

to their own doctrine, for the redemption of men, and that if Judas had not received the thirty pieces, the divine wisdom would have been impugned, Providence frustrated, its designs upset, and the world given over to evil, ignorance, and death.

MARCUS. Divine wisdom foresaw that Judas, though he was not obliged to give the traitor's kiss, would give it, notwithstanding. It thus employed the sin of Iscariot as a stone in the marvellous edifice of the redemption.

ZENOTHEMIS. I spoke just now, Marcus, as though I believed that the redemption of men had been accomplished by Jesus crucified, because I know that such is the belief of the Christians, and I borrowed their opinion that I might the better show the mistake of those who believe in the eternal damnation of Judas. But, in reality, Jesus was, in my eyes, but the precursor of Basilides and Valentinus. As to the mystery of the redemption, I will tell you, my dear friends—if you are at all curious to hear it—how it was really accomplished on earth.

The guests made a sign of assent. Like the Athenian virgins with the baskets sacred to Ceres, twelve young girls, bearing on their heads baskets filled with pomegranates and apples, entered the room with a light step, in time to the music of an

invisible flute. They placed the baskets on the table, the flute ceased, and Zenothemis spoke as follows—

"When Eunoia, 'the thought of God,' had created the world, she confided the government of the earth to the angels. But they did not preserve the dispassion befitting masters. Seeing that the daughters of men were fair, they surprised them in the evening by the wellside, and united themselves to them. From these unions sprang a turbulent race, who covered the earth with injustice and cruelty, and the dust of the roads drank up the blood of the innocent. The sight of this caused Eunoia infinite grief.

" 'See what I have done!' she sighed, leaning towards the world. 'My poor children are plunged in misery, and by my fault. Their suffering is my crime, and I will expiate it. God Himself, who only thinks through me, would be powerless to restore them to their pristine purity. That which is done is done, and the creation will remain for ever imperfect. But, at least, I will not forsake my creatures. If I cannot make them happy, like me, I can make myself unhappy, like them. Since I committed the mistake of giving them bodies which dishonour them, I will myself assume a body like unto theirs, and will go and live amongst them.'

"Having thus spoken, Eunoia descended to the earth, and was incarnate in the breast of a woman of Argos. She was born small and feeble, and received the name of Helen. She submitted to all the labours of this life, but soon grew in grace and beauty, and became the most desired of women, as she had determined, in order that her mortal body might be tried by the most supreme defilements. An inert prey to lascivious and violent men, she suffered rape and adultery, in expiation of all the adulteries, all the violences, all the iniquities, and caused, by her beauty, the ruin of nations, that God might pardon the sins of the universe. And never was the celestial thought, never was Eunoia, so adorable as in those days when, as a woman, she prostituted herself to heroes and shepherds. The poets surmised her divinity when they painted her so peaceful, superb, and fatal, and when they addressed that invocation to her, 'A soul as serene as a calm upon the waters.'

"Thus was Eunoia led by pity into evil and suffering. She died, and the Argives still show her tomb —for it was necessary that she should know death after lust, and taste the bitter fruit she had sown. But, emerging from the decomposed flesh of Helen, she became incarnate again as a woman, and again suffered every form of insult and outrage. Thus,

passing from body to body, throughout all the evil ages, she takes upon her the sins of the world. Her sacrifice will not be in vain. Joined to us by the bonds of the flesh, loving us, and weeping with us, she will effect her redemption and ours, and will carry us, clinging to her white breast, into the peace of the regained paradise."

HERMODORUS. This myth was not unknown to me. I remembered having heard that, in one of her metamorphoses, the divine Helen lived with the magician, Simon, in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius. I thought, however, that her perdition was involuntary, and that she was dragged down by the angels in their fall.

ZENOTHEMIS. It is true, Hermodorus, that men who were not properly initiated in the mysteries, have imagined that the sad Eunoia was not a party to her own downfall. But if it were as they assert, Eunoia would not be the expiating courtesan, the victim covered with stains of all sorts, the bread steeped in the wine of our shame, the pleasant offering, the meritorious sacrifice, the holocaust, the smoke of which rises to God. If they were not voluntary, there would be no merit in her sins.

CALLICRATES. Does anyone know, Zenothemis, in what country, under what name, in what adorable form, this ever-renascent Helen is living now?

ZENOTHEMIS. A man would have to be very wise indeed to discover such a secret. And wisdom, Callicrates, is not given to poets, who live in the rude world of forms and amuse themselves, like children, with sounds and empty shows.

CALLICRATES. Beware of offending the gods, impious Zenothemis; the poets are dear to them. The first laws were dictated in verse by the immortals themselves, and the oracles of the gods are poems. Hymns have a pleasant sound to celestial ears. Who does not know that the poets are prophets, and that nothing is hidden from them? Being a poet myself, and crowned with Apollo's laurel, I will make known to all the last incarnation of Eunoia. The eternal Helen is close to us; she is looking at us, and we are looking at her. You see that woman reclining on the cushions of her couch —so beautiful and so contemplative—whose eyes shed tears, and whose lips abound with kisses! It is she! Lovely as in the time of Priam and the halcyon days of Asia, Eunoia is now called Thaïs.

PHILINA. What do you say, Callicrates? Our dear Thaïs knew Paris, Menelaus, and the Achaians who fought before Ilion! Was the Trojan horse big, Thaïs?

ARISTOBULUS. Who speaks of a horse?

"I have drunk like a Thracian!" cried Chereas; and he rolled under the table.

Callicrates, raising his cup, cried—

"If we drink like desperate men, we die unavenged!"

Old Cotta was asleep, and his bald head nodded slowly above his broad shoulders.

For some time past Dorion had seemed to be greatly excited under his philosophic cloak. He reeled up to the couch of Thaïs.

"Thaïs, I love you, although it is unseemly in me to love a woman."

THAÏS. Why did you not love me before?

DORION. Because I had not supped.

THAÏS. But I, my poor friend, have drunk nothing but water; therefore you must excuse me if I do not love you.

Dorion did not wait to hear more, but made towards Drosea, who had made a sign to him in order to get him away from her friend. Zenothemis took the place he had left, and gave Thaïs a kiss on the mouth.

THAÏS. I thought you more virtuous.

ZENOTHEMIS. I am perfect, and the perfect are subject to no laws.

THAÏS. But are you not afraid of sullying your soul in a woman's arms?

ZENOTHEMIS. The body may yield to lust without the soul being concerned.

THAÏS. Go away! I wish to be loved with body and soul. All these philosophers are old goats.

The lamps died out one by one. The pale rays of dawn, which entered between the openings of the hangings, shone on the livid faces and swollen eyes of the guests. Aristobulus was sleeping soundly by the side of Chereas, and, in his dreams, devoting all his grooms to the ravens. Zenothemis pressed in his arms the yielding Philina; Dorion poured on the naked bosom of Drosea drops of wine, which rolled like rubies on the white breast, which was shaking with laughter, and the philosopher tried to catch these drops with his lips, as they rolled on the slippery flesh. Eucrites rose, and placing his arm on the shoulder of Nicias, led him to the end of the hall.

"Friend," he said, smiling, "if you can still think at all—of what are you thinking?"

"I think that the love of women is like a garden of Adonis."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Do you not know, Eucrites, that women make little gardens on the terraces, in which they plant boughs in clay pots in honour of the lover of Venus?

These boughs flourish a little time, and then fade."

"What does that signify, Nicias? That it is foolish to attach importance to that which fades?"

"If beauty is but a shadow, desire is but a lightning flash. What madness it is, then, to desire beauty! Is it not rational, on the contrary, that that which passes should go with that which does not endure, and that the lightning should devour the gliding shadow?"

"Nicias, you seem to me like a child playing at knuckle-bones. Take my advice—be free! By liberty only can you become a man."

"How can a man be free, Eucrites, when he has a body?"

"You shall see presently, my son. Presently you will say, 'Eucrites was free.' "

The old man spoke, leaning against a porphyry pillar, his face lighted by the first rays of dawn. Hermodorus and Marcus had approached, and stood before him by the side of Nicias; and all four, regardless of the laughter and cries of the drinkers, conversed on things divine. Eucrites expressed himself so wisely and eloquently, that Marcus said—

"You are worthy to know the true God."

Eucrites replied—

"The true God is in the heart of the wise man."

Then they spoke of death.

"I wish," said Eucrites, "that it may find me occupied in correcting my faults, and attentive to all my duties. In the face of death I will raise my pure hands to heaven, and I will say to the gods, 'Your images, gods, that you have placed in the temple of my soul, I have not profaned; I have hung there my thoughts, as well as garlands, fillets, and wreaths. I have lived according to your providence. I have lived enough.' "

Thus speaking, he raised his arms to heaven, and he remained thoughtful a moment. Then he continued, with extreme joy—

"Separate thyself from life, Eucrites, like the ripe olive which falls; returning thanks to the tree which bore thee, and blessing the earth, thy nurse."

At these words, drawing from the folds of his robe a naked dagger, he plunged it into his breast.

Those who listened to him sprang forward to seize his hand, but the steel point had already penetrated the heart of the sage. Eucrites had already entered into his rest. Hermodorus and Nicias bore the pale and bleeding body to one of the couches, amidst the shrill shrieks of the women, the grunts of the guests disturbed in their sleep, and the heavy breathing of the couples hidden in the shadow of the tapestry. Cotta, an old soldier, who slept

lightly, woke, approached the corpse, examined the wound, and cried—

"Call Aristæus, my physician!"

Nicias shook his head.

"Eucrites is no more," he said. "He wished to die as others wish to love. He has, like all of us, obeyed his inexpressible desire. And, lo, now he is like unto the gods, who desire nothing."

Cotta struck his forehead.

"Die! To want to die when he might still serve the State! What nonsense!"

Paphnutius and Thaïs remained motionless and mute, side by side, their souls overflowing with disgust, horror, and hope.

Suddenly the monk seized the hand of the actress, and stepping over the drunkards, who had fallen close to the lascivious couples, and treading in the wine and blood spilt upon the floor, he led her out of the house.

HE sun had risen over the city. Long colonnades stretched on both sides of the deserted street, and at the end shone the dome of Alexander's tomb. Here and there on the pavement lay broken wreaths and extinguished torches. Fresh wafts of the sea could be felt in the air. Paphnutius, with a look of disgust, tore off his rich robe and trampled the fragments under his feet.

"Thou hast heard them, my Thaïs!" he cried. "They have spat forth every sort of folly and abomination. They dragged the Divine Creator of all things down the gemonies * of the devils of hell, impudently denied the existence of Good and Evil, blasphemed Jesus, and exalted Judas. And the most infamous of all, the jackal of darkness, the stinking beast, the Arian full of corruption and death, opened his mouth like a yawning sepulchre. My Thaïs, thou hast seen these filthy snails crawling towards thee and defiling thee with their sticky sweat; thou hast seen others, like brutes, sleeping under

* Steps on the Aventine Hill, leading to the Tiber, to which the bodies of executed criminals were dragged to be thrown into the river. The word is now obsolete, but was employed by Ben Jonson (*Sejanus*) and Massinger (*The Roman Actor*).—Trans.

the heels of their slaves; thou hast seen them coupling like beasts on the carpet they had fouled with their vomit; thou hast seen a foolish old man shed a blood yet viler than the wine which flowed at his debauch, and at the end of the orgie throw himself in the face of the unforeseen Christ. Praise be to God! Thou hast seen error and recognised how hideous it was. Thaïs, Thaïs, Thaïs, recall to mind the follies of these philosophers, and say if thou wilt go mad with them! Remember the looks, the gestures, the laughs of their fitting companions, those two lascivious and malicious strumpets, and say if thou wilt remain like unto them."

Thaïs, her heart stirred with horror and disgust at all she had seen and heard that night, and feeling the indifference and brutality, the malicious jealousy of women, the heavy weight of useless hours, sighed.

"I am weary to death, O my father! Where shall I find rest? I feel that my face is burning, my head empty, and my arms are so tired that I should not have the strength to seize happiness were it within reach of my hand."

Paphnutius gazed at her with loving pity.

"Courage, O my sister! The hour of rest rises for thee, white and pure as the vapours thou seest rise from the gardens and waters."

They were near the house of Thaïs, and could

see, above the wall, the tops of the sycamore and fir trees, which surrounded the Grotto of Nymphs, tremble in the morning breeze. In front of them was a public square, deserted, and surrounded with steles and votive statues, and having at each end a semicircular marble seat, supported by figures of monsters. Thaïs fell on one of these seats. Then, looking anxiously at the monk, she asked—

"What must I do?"

"Thou must," replied the monk, "follow Him who has come to seek thee. He will separate thee from this present life, as the vintager gathers the cluster that would have rotted on the tree, and bears it to the wine-press to change it into perfumed wine. Listen! there is a dozen hours from Alexandria, towards the west, not far from the sea, a nunnery, the rules of which, a masterpiece of wisdom, deserve to be put in lyric verse and sung to the sound of the theorbo and tambourines. It may truly be said that the women who are there, submissive to these rules, have their feet upon earth and their faces in heaven. They desire to be poor, that Jesus may love them, modest, that He may gaze upon them every day in the guise of a gardener, His feet bare, His beautiful hands open—even as He showed Himself to Mary at the entrance of the tomb. I will conduct thee this very day to this nunnery, my

Thaïs, and soon, commingling with these holy women, thou wilt share in their heavenly conversation. They await thee as a sister. On the threshold of the convent, their mother, the pious Albina, will give thee the kiss of peace and will say, 'My daughter, thou art welcome!' "

The courtesan uttered a cry of amazement.

"Albina! a daughter of the Cæsars! The great niece of the Emperor Carus!"

"She herself! Albina, who, born in the purple, has donned the serge, and a daughter of the masters of this world, has risen to the rank of servant of Jesus Christ. She will be thy mother."

Thaïs rose and said—

"Take me to the house of Albina."

And Paphnutius, completing his victory—

"Surely I will conduct thee thither, and there I will place thee in a cell, where thou shalt weep for thy sins. For it is not fitting that thou shouldst mingle with the daughters of Albina until thou art cleansed from thy sins. I will seal the door, and there, a happy prisoner, thou wilt wait in tears till Jesus Himself come, as a sign of pardon, to break the seal that I have placed. And doubt not that He will come, Thaïs, and how the flesh of thy soul will tremble when thou shalt feel the fingers of Light placed upon thy eyes to dry thy tears!"

Thaïs said a second time—

"Take me, my father, to the house of Albina."

His heart filled with joy, Paphnutius gazed around him, and tasted, almost without fear, the pleasure of contemplating the works of creation; his eyes drank in with joy God's light, and unknown breezes fanned his cheeks. Suddenly, seeing at one of the corners of the public square the little door which led to Thaïs' house, and remembering that the trees, whose foliage he had been admiring, shaded the courtesan's garden, he thought of all the impurities which there sullied the air, to-day so light and pure, and his soul was so grieved that bitter tears sprang to his eyes.

"Thaïs," he said, "we must fly without looking back. But we must not leave behind us the instruments, the witnesses, the accomplices of thy past crimes; those heavy hangings, those beds, carpets, perfume censers and lamps, which would proclaim thy infamy! Dost thou wish that, animated by the demons, and carried by the evil spirit that is in them, those accursed belongings should pursue thee even to the desert? It is but too true that there are tables which bring ruin, seats which serve as the instruments of devils, which act, speak, strike the ground, and pass through the air. Let all perish which has seen thy shame! Hasten, Thaïs, and,

whilst the city is yet asleep, order thy slaves to make, in the centre of this place, a pile, upon which we will burn all the abominable riches thy dwelling contains."

Thaïs consented.

"Do as you will, my father," she said. "I know that spirits often dwell in inanimate objects. At night some articles of furniture talk, either by giving knocks at regular intervals or by emitting little flashes of light as signals. And even more. Have you remarked, my father, at the entrance to the Grotto of Nymphs, on the right, a statue of a naked woman about to bathe? One day I saw, with my own eyes, that statue turn its head like a living person, and then return to its ordinary attitude. I was terrified. Nicias, to whom I related this prodigy, laughed at me; yet there must be some magic in that statue, for it inspired with violent desires a certain Dalmatian, who was insensible to my beauty. It is certain that I have lived amongst enchanted things, and that I was exposed to the greatest perils, for men have been strangled by the embraces of a bronze statue. Yet it would be a pity to destroy valuable works made with rare skill, and to burn my carpets and tapestry would be a great loss. The beautiful colours of some of them are truly wonderful, and they cost much money to those who gave

them to me. I also possess cups, statues, and pictures of great price. I do not think they ought to perish. But you know what is necessary. Do as you will, my father."

Thus saying, she followed the monk to the little door at which so many garlands and wreaths had been hung, and, when it was opened, she told the porter to call together all the slaves in the house. Four Indians, who were employed in the kitchen, were the first to appear. They were all four yellow men, and each had but one eye. It had cost Thaïs much trouble, and given her amusement, to get together these four slaves of the same race, and all afflicted with the same infirmity. When they attended at table they excited the curiosity of the guests, and Thaïs made them relate the story of their lives. These four waited in silence. Their assistants followed them. Then came the stablemen, the huntsmen, the litter-bearers, and the running footmen with muscles like iron, two gardeners hirsute as Priapus, six ferocious looking negroes, three Greek slaves—one a grammarian, another a poet, and the third a singer. They all stood, ranged in order, on the public square, and were presently joined by the negresses—curious, suspicious, rolling big round eyes, and each with a huge mouth slit to her earrings. Lastly, adjusting their

veils and languidly dragging their feet, which were shackled with light gold chains, appeared six sulky-looking, beautiful white slave-girls. When they were all assembled, Thaïs, pointing to Paphnutius, said—

"Do whatever this man commands you; for the spirit of God is in him, and if you disobey him you will fall dead."

For she had heard, and really believed, that the earth would open and swallow up in flames and smoke any impious wretch whom a saint of the desert struck with his staff.

Paphnutius sent away the women and the Greek men-slaves, and said to the others—

"Bring wood to the middle of this place, make a huge fire, and throw into it pell-mell all that there is in the house and grotto."

They were astonished, and stood motionless, looking at their mistress. And they still stood inactive and silent, and pressed against each other, elbow to elbow, suspecting that the order was a joke.

"Obey!" said the monk.

Several of them were Christians. They understood the command, and went to the house to fetch wood and torches. The others were not indisposed to imitate them, for, being poor, they hated riches

and had a natural instinct for destruction. Whilst they were building the pile, Paphnutius said to Thaïs—"I thought at one time of fetching the treasurer of one of the churches of Alexandria (if there still remain one worthy of the name of church, and that is not defiled by the Arian beasts) and giving him thy goods, woman, that he might distribute them to widows, and change the proceeds of crime into the treasure of justice. But such a thought did not come from God, and I cast it from me, for assuredly it would be a great offence to the well-beloved of Jesus Christ to offer them the spoils of thy lust. Thaïs, all that thou hast touched must be devoured by the fire, even to its very soul. Thanks be to Heaven, these tunics and veils, which have seen kisses more innumerable than the waves of the sea, will only feel now the lips and tongues of the flames. Hasten, slaves! More wood! More links and torches! And thou, woman, return to thy house, strip thyself of thy shameful robes, and ask of the most humble of thy slaves, as an undeserving favour, the tunic that she puts on when she scrubs the floors."

Thaïs obeyed. Whilst the Indians knelt down and blew the embers, the negroes threw on the pile coffers of ivory, ebony, or cedar, which broke open and let out wreaths, garlands, and necklaces. The

smoke rose in a dark column, as in the holocausts of the old religion. Then the fire, which had been smouldering, burst out suddenly with a roar as of some monstrous animal, and the almost invisible flames began to devour their valuable prey. The slaves worked more eagerly; they joyfully dragged out rich carpets, veils embroidered with silver, and flowered tapestry. They staggered under the weight of tables, couches, thick cushions, and beds with gold nails. Three strong Ethiopians came hugging the coloured statues of the nymphs, one of which had been loved as though it were a mortal; and they looked like huge apes carrying off women. And when the beautiful naked forms fell from the arms of these monsters, and were broken on the stones, a deep groan was heard.

At that moment Thaïs appeared, her hair unloosed and streaming over her shoulders, barefooted, and clad in a clumsy coarse garment which seemed redolent with divine voluptuousness merely from having touched her body. Behind her came a gardener, carrying, half hidden in his long beard, an ivory Eros.

She made a sign to the man to stop, and approaching Paphnutius, showed him the little god.

"My father," she asked, "should this also be thrown into the flames? It is of marvellous antique

work, and is worth a hundred times its weight in gold. Its loss would be irreparable, for there is not a sculptor in the world capable of making such a beautiful Eros. Remember also, my father, that this child is Love, and he should not be harshly treated. Believe me, Love is a virtue, and if I have sinned, it is not through him, my father, but against him. Never shall I regret aught that he has caused me to do, and I deplore only those things I have done contrary to his commands. He does not allow women to give themselves to those who do not come in his name. For that reason he ought to be honoured. Look, Paphnutius, how pretty this little Eros is! With what grace he hides himself in the gardener's beard! One day Nicias, who loved me then, brought it to me and said, 'It will remind you of me.' But the roguish boy did not remind me of Nicias, but of a young man I knew at Antioch. Enough riches have been destroyed upon this pile, my father! Preserve this Eros, and place it in some monastery. Those who see it will turn their hearts towards God, for love leads naturally to heavenly thoughts."

The gardener, already believing that the little Eros was saved, smiled on it as though it had been a child, when Paphnutius, snatching the god from the

arms which held it, threw it into the flames, crying—

"It is enough that Nicias has touched it to make it replete with every sort of poison!"

Then, seizing by armfuls the sparkling robes, the purple mantles, the golden sandals, the combs, strigils, mirrors, lamps, theorbos, and lyres, he threw them into this furnace, more costly than the funeral pile of Sardanapalus, whilst, drunken with the rage of destruction, the slaves danced round, uttering wild yells amid a shower of sparks and ashes.

One by one, the neighbours, awakened by the noise, opened the windows, and rubbing their eyes, looked out to see whence the smoke came. Then they came down, half dressed, and drew near the fire.

"What does it mean?" they wondered.

Amongst them were merchants from whom Thaïs had often bought perfumes and stuffs, and they looked on anxiously with long, yellow faces, unable to comprehend what was going on. Some young debauchees, who, returning from a supper, passed by there, preceded by their slaves, stopped, their heads crowned with flowers, their tunics floating, and uttered loud cries. Attracted by curiosity, the crowd increased unceasingly, and soon it was known

that Thaïs had been persuaded by the Abbot of Antinoë to burn her riches. and retire to a nunnery.

The shopkeepers thought to themselves—

"Thaïs is going to leave the city; we shall sell no more to her; it is dreadful to think of. What will become of us without her? This monk has driven her mad. He is ruining us. Why let him do it? What is the use of the laws? Are there no magistrates in Alexandria? Thaïs does not think about us and our wives and our poor children. It is a public scandal. She ought to be compelled to stay in the city."

The young men, on their part, also thought—

"If Thaïs is going to renounce acting and love, our chief amusements will be taken from us. She was the glory, delight, and honour of the stage. She was the joy even of those who had never possessed her. The women we loved, we loved in her. There were no kisses given in which she was altogether absent, for she was the joy of all voluptuaries, and the mere thought that she breathed amongst us excited us to pleasure."

Thus thought the young men, and one of them, named Cerons, who had held her in his arms, cried out upon the abduction, and blasphemed against

Christ. In every group the conduct of Thaïs was severely criticised.

"It is a shameful flight!"

"A cowardly desertion!"

"She is taking the bread out of our mouths."

"She is robbing our children."

"She ought at least to pay for the wreaths I have sold to her."

"And the sixty robes she has ordered of me."

"She owes money to everybody."

"Who will represent Iphigenia, Electra, and Polyxena when she is gone? The handsome Polybia herself will not make such a success as she has done."

"Life will be dull when her door is closed."

"She was the bright star, the soft moon of the Alexandrian sky."

All the most notorious mendicants of the city—cripples, blind men, and paralytics—had by this time assembled in the place; and crawling through the remnants of the riches, they groaned—

"How shall we live when Thaïs is no longer here to feed us? Every day the fragments from her table fed two hundred poor wretches, and her lovers, when they quitted her, threw us as they passed handfuls of silver pieces."

Some thieves, too, also mingled with the crowd, and created a deafening clamour, and pushed their neighbours, to increase disorder, and take advantage of the tumult to filch some valuable object.

Old Taddeus, who sold Miletan wool and Tarentan linen, and to whom Thaïs owed a large sum of money, alone remained calm and silent in the midst of the uproar. He listened and watched, and gently stroking his goat-beard, seemed thoughtful. At last he approached young Cerons, and pulling him by the sleeve, whispered—

"You are the favoured lover of Thaïs, handsome youth; show yourself, and do not allow this monk to carry her off."

"By Pollux and his sister, he shall not!" cried Cerons. "I will speak to Thaïs, and without flattering myself, I think she will listen to me rather than to that sooty-faced Lapithan. Place! Place, dogs!"

And striking with his fist the men, upsetting the old women and treading on the young children, he reached Thaïs, and taking her aside—

"Dearest girl," he said, "look at me, remember, and tell me truly if you renounce love."

But Paphnutius threw himself between Thaïs and Cerons.

"Impious wretch!" he cried, "beware and touch her not; she is sacred—she belongs to God."

"Get away, baboon!" replied the young man furiously. "Let me speak to my sweetheart, or if not I will drag your obscene carcase by the beard to the fire, and roast you like a sausage."

And he put his hand on Thaïs. But, pushed away by the monk with unexpected force, he staggered back four paces and fell at the foot of the pile amongst the scattered ashes.

Old Taddeus, meanwhile, had been going from one to the other, pulling the ears of the slaves and kissing the hands of the masters, inciting each and all against Paphnutius, and had already formed a little band resolutely determined to oppose the monk who would steal Thaïs from them.

Cerons rose, his face black, his hair singed, and choking with smoke and rage. He blasphemed against the gods, and threw himself amongst the assailants, behind whom the beggars crawled, shaking their crutches. Paphnutius was soon enclosed in a circle of menacing fists, raised sticks, and cries of death.

"To the ravens with the monk! to the ravens!"

"No; throw him in the fire! Burn him alive!"

Seizing his fair prey, he pressed her to his heart.

"Impious men," he cried in a voice of thunder, "strive not to tear the dove from the eagle of the Lord. But rather copy this woman, and like her, turn your filth into gold. Imitate her example, and renounce the false wealth which you think you hold, and which holds you. Hasten! the day is at hand, and divine patience begins to grow weary. Repent, confess your sins, weep and pray. Walk in the footsteps of Thaïs. Hate your offences, which are as great as hers. Which of you, poor or rich, merchants, soldiers, slaves or eminent citizens, would dare to say, before God, that he was better than a prostitute? You are all nothing but living filth, and it is by a miracle of divine goodness that you do not suddenly turn into streams of mire."

Whilst he spoke flames shot from his eyes; and it seemed as though live coals came from his lips and those who surrounded him were obliged to hear him in spite of themselves.

But old Taddeus did not remain idle. He picked up stones and oyster shells, which he hid in the skirt of his tunic, and not daring to throw them himself, slipped them into the hands of the beggars. Soon the stones began to fly, and a well-directed shell cut Paphnutius' face. The blood, which flowed down the dark face of the martyr, dropped in a new baptism on the head of the penitent, and Thaïs, half

stifled in the monk's embrace and her delicate skin scratched by the coarse cassock, felt a thrill of horror and fright.

At that moment a man elegantly dressed, and with a wreath of wild celery on his head, opened a road for himself through the furious crowd, and cried—

"Stop! Stop! This monk is my brother!"

It was Nicias, who, having closed the eyes of the philosopher Eucrites, was passing through the square to return to his house, and saw, without very much surprise (for nothing astonished him), the smoking pile, Thaïs clad in a serge cassock, and Paphnutius being stoned.

He repeated—

"Stop, I tell you; spare my old fellow-scholar; respect the beloved head of Paphnutius!"

But, being only used to subtle disquisitions with philosophers, he did not possess that imperious energy which commands vulgar minds. He was not listened to. A shower of stones and shells fell on the monk, who, protecting Thaïs with his body, praised the Lord whose goodness turned his wounds into caresses. Despairing of making himself heard, and feeling but too sure that he could not save his friend either by force or persuasion, Nicias resigned himself to the will of the gods—in whom he had

little confidence—when the idea occurred to him to use a stratagem which his contempt for men had suddenly suggested to him. He took from his girdle his purse, which was full of gold and silver, for he was a pleasure-loving and charitable man, and running up to the men who were throwing the stones, he chinked the money in their ears. At first they paid no attention to him, their fury being too great; but little by little their looks turned towards the chinking gold, and soon their arms dropped and no longer menaced their victim. Seeing that he had attracted their eyes and minds, Nicias opened his purse and threw some pieces of gold and silver amongst the crowd. The more greedy of them stooped to pick it up. The philosopher, pleased at his first success, adroitly threw deniers and drachmas here and there. At the sound of the pieces of money rattling on the pavement, the persecutors of Paphnutius threw themselves on the ground. Beggars, slaves, and tradespeople scrambled after the money, whilst, grouped round Cerons, the patricians watched the struggle and laughed heartily. Cerons himself quite forgot his wrath. His friends encouraged the rivals, chose competitors, and made bets, and urged on the miserable wretches as they would have done fight-

ing dogs. A cripple without legs having succeeded in seizing a drachma, the applause was frenetic. The young men themselves began to throw money, and nothing was to be seen in the square but a multitude of backs, rising and falling like waves of the sea, under a shower of coins. Paphnutius was forgotten.

Nicias ran up to him, covered him with his cloak, and dragged him and Thaïs into by-streets where they were safe from pursuit. They ran for some time in silence, and when they thought they were out of reach of their enemies, they ceased running, and Nicias said, in a tone of raillery in which a little sadness was mingled—

"It is finished then! Pluto ravishes Proserpine, and Thaïs will follow my fierce-looking friend whithersoever he will lead her."

"It is true, Nicias," replied Thaïs, "that I am tired of living with men like you, smiling, perfumed, kindly egoists. I am weary of all I know, and I am, therefore, going to seek the unknown. I have experienced joy that was not joy, and here is a man who teaches me that sorrow is true joy. I believe him, for he knows the truth."

"And I, sweetheart," replied Nicias, smiling, "I know the truths. He knows but one, I know them

all. I am superior to him in that respect, but to tell the truth, it doesn't make me any the prouder nor any the happier."

Then, seeing that the monk was glaring fiercely at him—

"My dear Paphnutius, do not imagine that I think you extremely absurd, or even altogether unreasonable. And if I were to compare your life with mine, I could not say which is preferable in itself. I shall presently go and take the bath which Crobyle and Myrtale have prepared for me; I shall eat the wing of a Phasian pheasant; then I shall read—for the hundredth time—some fable by Apuleius or some treatise by Porphyry. You will return to your cell, where, leaning like a tame camel, you will ruminate on—I know not what—formulas of incarnations you have long chewed and rechewed, and in the evening you will swallow some radishes without any oil. Well, my dear friend, in accomplishing these acts, so different apparently, we are both obeying the same sentiment, the only motive for all human actions; we are both seeking our own pleasure, and striving to attain the same end—happiness, the impossible happiness. It would be folly on my part to say you were wrong, dear friend, even though I think myself in the right.

"And you, my Thaïs, go and enjoy yourself, and

be more happy still, if it be possible, in abstinence and austerity than you have been in riches and pleasure. On the whole, I should say you were to be envied. For if in our whole lives, Paphnutius and I have pursued but one kind of pleasurable satisfaction, you in your life, dear Thaïs, have tasted diverse joys such as it is rarely given to the same person to know. I should really like to be for one hour, a saint like our dear friend Paphnutius. But that is not possible. Farewell, then, Thaïs! Go where the secret forces of nature and your destiny conduct you! Go, and take with you, whithersoever you go, the good wishes of Nicias! I know that is mere foolishness, but can I give you anything more than barren regrets and vain wishes in payment for the delicious illusions which once enveloped me when I was in your arms, and of which only the shadow now remains to me? Farewell, my benefactress! Farewell, goodness that is ignorant of its own existence, mysterious virtue, joy of men! Farewell to the most adorable of the images that nature has ever thrown—for some unknown reasons—on the face of this deceptive world!"

Whilst he spoke, deep wrath had been brewing in the monk's heart, and it now broke forth in imprecations.

"Avaunt, cursed wretch! I scorn thee and hate thee. Go, child of hell, a thousand times worse than those poor lost ones who just now threw stones and insults at me! They knew not what they did, and the grace of God, which I implored for them, may some day descend into their hearts. But thou, detestable Nicias, thou art but a perfidious venom and a bitter poison. Thy mouth breathes despair and death. One of thy smiles contains more blasphemy than issues in a century from the smoking lips of Satan. Avaunt, backslider!"

Nicias looked at him.

"Farewell, my brother," he said, "and may you preserve until your life's end your store of faith, hate, and love. Farewell, Thaïs! It is in vain that you will forget me, because I shall ever remember you."

On quitting them he walked thoughtfully through the winding streets in the vicinity of the great cemetery of Alexandria, which are peopled by the makers of funeral urns. Their shops were full of clay figures painted in bright colours and representing gods and goddesses, mimes, women, winged spirits, &c., such as were usually buried with the dead. He fancied that perhaps some of the little images which he saw there might be the companions of his eternal sleep; and it seemed to him that a little Eros, with

its tunic tucked up, laughed at him mockingly. He looked forward to his death, and the idea was painful to him. To cure his sadness he tried to philosophise, and reasoned thus—

"Assuredly," he said to himself, "time has no reality. It is a simple illusion of our minds. Then, if it does not exist, how can it bring death to me? Does that mean that I shall live for ever? No, but I conclude therefrom that my death is, always has been, as it always will be. I do not feel it yet, but it is in me, and I ought not to fear it, for it would be folly to dread the coming of that which has arrived. It exists, like the last page of a book I read and have not finished."

This argument occupied him all the rest of the way, but without making him more cheerful; and his mind was filled with dismal thoughts when he arrived at the door of his house and heard the merry laughter of Crobyle and Myrtale, who were playing at tennis whilst they were waiting for him.

Paphnutius and Thaïs left the city by the Gate of the Moon, and followed the coast.

"Woman," said the monk, "all that great blue sea could not wash away thy pollutions."

He spoke with scorn and anger.

"More filthy than a bitch or a sow, thou hast prostituted to pagans and infidels a body which the

Eternal had intended for a tabernacle, and thy impurities are such that, now that thou knowest the truth, thou canst not unite thy lips or join thy hands without a horror of thyself rising in thy heart."

She followed him meekly, over stony roads, under a burning sun. Her knees ached from fatigue, and her throat was parched with thirst. But, far from feeling any of the pity which softens the hearts of the profane, Paphnutius rejoiced at these propitiatory sufferings of the flesh which had so sinned. So infuriated was he with holy zeal that he would have liked to cut with rods the body that had preserved its beauty as a shining witness to its infamy. His meditations augmented his pious fury, and remembering that Thaïs had received Nicias in her bed, that idea seemed so horrible to him that his blood all flowed back to his heart, and his breast felt ready to burst. His curses were stifled in his throat, and he could only grind his teeth. He sprang forward and stood before her, pale, terrible, and filled with the Spirit of God—looked into her very soul, and then spat in her face.

She calmly wiped her face and continued to walk on. He followed, glaring at her in pious anger, as if she had been hell itself. He was thinking how he could avenge Christ in order that Christ should

not avenge Himself, when he saw a drop of blood that had dripped from the foot of Thaïs on the sand. Then a hitherto unknown influence entered his opened heart, sobs rose to his lips, he wept, he ran and knelt before her, called her his sister, and kissed her bleeding feet. He murmured a hundred times, "My sister, my sister, my mother, O most holy!"

He prayed—

"Angels of heaven, receive carefully this drop of blood, and bear it before the throne of the Lord. And may a miraculous anemone blossom on the sand sprinkled with the blood of Thaïs, that those who see the flower may recover purity of heart and feeling. O holy, holy, most holy Thaïs!"

As he prayed and prophesied thus, a lad passed on an ass. Paphnutius ordered him to descend, seated Thaïs on the ass, and led it by the bridle. Towards evening they came to a canal shaded by fine trees; he tied the ass to the trunk of a date palm, and sitting on a mossy stone he shared with Thaïs a loaf, which they ate with salt and hyssop. They drank fresh water in their hands, and talked of things eternal. She said—

"I have never drunk water so pure, nor breathed an air so light, and I feel that God floats in the breezes that pass."

"Look! it is the evening, O my sister. The blue shadows of night cover the hills. But soon thou wilt see shining in the dawn the tabernacles of Light; soon thou wilt behold shine forth the roses of the eternal morning."

They journeyed all night, and, while the crescent moon gleamed on the silver crests of the waves, they sang psalms and hymns. When the sun rose, the Libyan desert stretched before them like a huge lion-skin. At the edge of the desert, and close to a few palm-trees, some white huts shimmered in the morning light.

"Are those the tabernacles of Light, father?" asked Thaïs.

"Even so, my daughter and my sister. Yonder is the House of Salvation, where I will confine you with my own hands."

Soon they saw a number of women busy around the buildings, like bees round their hives. There were some who baked bread, or prepared vegetables; many were spinning wool, and the light of heaven shone upon them like a smile of God. Others meditated in the shade of the tamarisk trees; their white hands hung by their sides, for, being filled with love, they had chosen the part of Magdalen, and performed no work but prayer, contemplation, and ecstasy. They were, therefore, called the Marys, and

were clad in white. Those who worked with their hands were called the Marthas, and wore blue robes. All wore the hood, but the younger ones allowed a few curls to show on their foreheads—unintentionally, it is to be presumed, since it was forbidden by the rules. A very old lady, tall and white, walked from cell to cell, leaning on a staff of hard wood. Paphnutius approached her respectfully, kissed the hem of her veil, and said—

"The peace of the Lord be with thee, venerable Albina. I have brought to the hive, of which thou art queen, a bee I found lost on a flowerless road. I took it in the palm of my hand, and revived it with my breath. I give it to thee."

And he pointed to the actress, who knelt down before the daughter of the Cæsars.

Albina cast a piercing glance on Thaïs, ordered her to rise, kissed her on the forehead, and then, turning to the monk—

"We will place her," she said, "amongst the Marys."

Paphnutius then related how Thaïs had been brought to the House of Salvation, and asked that she should be at once confined in a cell. The abbess consented, and led the penitent to a hut, which had remained empty since the death of the virgin Læta, who had sanctified it. In this narrow chamber

there was but a bed, a table, and a pitcher, and Thaïs when she crossed the threshold, felt filled with ineffable joy.

"I wish to close the door myself," said Paphnutius, "and put thereon a seal, which Jesus will come and break with His own hands."

He went to the side of the spring, and took a handful of wet clay, mixed with it a little spittle and a hair from his head, and plastered it across the chink of the door. Then, approaching the window, near which Thaïs stood peaceful and happy, he fell on his knees and praised the Lord three times.

"How beautiful are the feet of her who walketh in the paths of righteousness! How beautiful are her feet, and how resplendent her face!"

He rose, lowered his hood over his eyes, and walked away slowly.

Albina called one of her virgins.

"My daughter," she said, "take to Thaïs those things which are needful for her—bread, water, and a flute with three holes."

PART THE THIRD

THE EUPHORBIA

PART THE THIRD

THE EUPHORBIA

PAPHNUTIUS had returned to the holy desert. He took, near Athribis, the boat which went up the Nile to carry food to the monastery of Abbot Serapion. When he disembarked, his disciples advanced to meet him with great demonstrations of joy. Some raised their arms to heaven; others, prostrate on the ground, kissed the Abbot's sandals. For they knew already what the saint had accomplished in Alexandria. The monks generally received, by rapid and unknown means, information concerning the safety or glory of the Church. News spread through the desert with the rapidity of the simoon.

When Paphnutius strode across the sand, his disciples followed him, praising the Lord. Flavian, who was the oldest member of the brotherhood, was suddenly seized with a pious frenzy, and began to sing an inspired hymn—

"O blessed day! Now is our father restored to us.
He has returned laden with fresh merits, of which we reap the benefit.

For the virtues of the father are the wealth of the children, and the sanctity of the Abbot illuminates every cell.

Paphnutius, our father, has given a new spouse to Jesus Christ.

By his wondrous art, he has changed a black sheep into a white sheep.

And now, behold, he has returned to us, laden with fresh merits.

Like unto the bee of the Arsinœtid, heavy with the nectar of flowers.

Even as the ram of Nubia, which could hardly bear the weight of its abundant wool.

Let us celebrate this day by mingling oil with our food."

When they came to the door of the Abbot's cell, they fell on their knees, and said—

"Let our father bless us, and give each of us a measure of oil to celebrate his return."

Paul the Fool, who alone had remained standing, asked, "Who is this man?" and did not recognise Paphnutius. But no one paid any attention to what he said, as he was known to be devoid of intelligence, though filled with piety.

The Abbot of Antinoë, locked in his cell, thought—

"I have at last regained the haven of my repose and happiness. I have returned to my fortress of contentment. But how is it that this roof of rushes, so dear to me, does not receive me as a friend, and

the walls say not to me, 'Thou art welcome.' Nothing has changed, since my departure, in this abode I have chosen. There is my table and my bed. There is the mummy's head which has so often inspired me with salutary thoughts; and there is the book in which I have so often sought conceptions of God. And yet nothing that I left is here. The things appear grievously despoiled of their customary charm, and it seems to me as though I saw them to-day for the first time. When I look at that table and couch, that in former days I made with my own hands, that black, dried head, these rolls of papyrus filled with the sayings of God, I seem to see the belongings of a dead man. After having known them all so well, I know them no longer. Alas! since nothing around me has really changed, it is I who am no longer what I was. I am another. I am the dead man! What has happened, my God? What has been taken from me? What is left unto me? And who am I?"

And it especially perplexed him to find, in spite of himself, that his cell was small, whereas, when viewed by the eye of faith, he ought to consider it immense, because the infinitude of God began there.

He began to pray, with his face against the ground, and felt a little happier. He had hardly been an hour in prayer, when a vision of Thaïs

passed before his eyes. He returned thanks to God—

"Jesus! it is Thou who hast sent her. I acknowledge in that Thy wonderful goodness; Thou wouldst please me, reassure me and comfort me by the sight of her whom I have given to Thee. Thou presentest her to my eyes with her smile now disarmed; her grace, now become innocent; her beauty, from which I have extracted the sting. To please me, my God, thou showest her to me as I have prepared and purified her for Thy designs, as one friend pleasantly reminds another of the rich gift he has received from him. Therefore I see this woman with delight, being assured that the vision comes from Thee. Thou dost not forget that I have given her to Thee, Jesus. Keep her, since she pleases Thee, and suffer not her beauty to give joy to any but Thyself."

He could not sleep all night, and he saw Thaïs more distinctly than he had seen her in the Grotto of Nymphs. He commended himself, saying—

"What I have done, I have done to the glory of God."

Yet, to his great surprise, his heart was not at ease. He sighed.

"Why art thou sad, O my soul, and why dost thou trouble me?"

And his mind was still perturbed. Thirty days he remained in that condition of sadness which precedes the sore trials of a solitary monk. The image of Thaïs never left him day or night. He did not try to banish it, because he still thought it came from God, and was the image of a saint. But one morning she visited him in a dream, her hair crowned with violets, and her very gentleness seemed so formidable, that he uttered a cry of fright, and woke in an icy sweat. His eyes were still heavy with sleep, when he felt a moist warm breath on his face. A little jackal, its two paws placed on the side of the bed, was panting its stinking breath in his face, and grinning at him.

Paphnutius was greatly astonished, and it seemed to him as though a tower had given way under his feet. And, in fact, he had fallen, for his self-confidence had gone. For some time he was incapable of thought and when he did recover himself, his meditations only increased his perplexity.

"It is one of two things," he said to himself; "either this vision, like the preceding ones, came from God, and was a good vision, and it is my natural perversity which has misrepresented it, as wine turns sour in a dirty cup. I have, by my unworthiness, changed instruction into reproach, of which this diabolical jackal immediately took ad-

vantage. Or else this vision came, not from God, but, on the contrary, from the devil, and was evil. In that case I should doubt whether the former ones had, as I thought, a celestial origin. I am therefore incapable of that discernment which is necessary for the ascetic. In either case it is plain that God is no longer with me,—of which I feel the effects, though I cannot explain the cause."

He reasoned in this way, and anxiously asked—

"Just God, what trials dost Thou appoint for Thy servants if the apparitions of Thy saints are a danger for them? Give me to discern, by an intelligible sign, that which comes from Thee, and that which comes from the other."

And as God, whose designs are inscrutable, did not see fit to enlighten his servant, Paphnutius, lost in doubt, resolved not to think of Thaïs any more. But his resolutions were vain. Though absent, she was ever with him. She gazed at him whilst he read, or meditated, or prayed, or met his eyes wherever he looked. Her imaginary approach was heralded by a slight sound, such as is made by a woman's dress when she walks, and the visions had more verisimilitude than reality itself, which moves and is confused, whereas the phantoms which are caused by solitude are fixed and unchangeable. She came under various appearances—sometimes pen-

sive, her head crowned with her last perishable wreath, clad as at the banquet at Alexandria, in a mauve robe spangled with silver flowers; sometimes voluptuously in a cloud of light veils, and bathed in the warm shadows of the Grotto of Nymphs; sometimes in a serge cassock, pious and radiant with celestial joy; sometimes tragic, her eyes swimming in the terrors of death, and showing her bare breast bedewed with the blood from her pierced heart. What disturbed him the most in these visions was that the wreaths, tunics, and veils, that he had burned with his own hands, should thus return; it became evident to him that these things had an imperishable soul, and he cried—

"Lo, all the countless souls of the sins of Thaïs come upon me!"

When he turned away his head, he felt that Thaïs was behind him, and that made him feel still more uneasy. His torture was cruel. But as his soul and body remained pure in the midst of all his temptations, he trusted in God, and gently complained to Him.

"My God, if I went so far to seek her amongst the Gentiles, it was for Thy sake, and not for mine. It would not be just that I should suffer for what I have done in Thy behalf. Protect me, sweet Jesus! My Saviour, save me! Suffer not the phantom to

accomplish that which the body could not. As I have triumphed over the flesh, suffer not the shadow to overthrow me. I know that I am now exposed to greater dangers than I ever ran. I feel and know that the dream has more power than the reality. And how could it be otherwise, since it is itself but a higher reality? It is the soul of things. Plato, though he was but an idolater, has testified to the real existence of ideas. At that banquet of demons to which Thou accompaniedst me, Lord, I heard men—sullied with crimes truly, but certainly not devoid of intelligence—agree to acknowledge that we see real objects in solitude, meditation, and ecstasy; and Thy Scriptures, my God, many times affirm the virtue of dreams, and the power of visions formed either by Thee, great God, or by Thy adversary."

There was a new man in him and now he reasoned with God, but God did not choose to enlighten him. His nights were one long dream, and his days did not differ from his nights. One morning he awoke uttering sighs, such as issue, by moonlight, from the tombs of the victims of crimes. Thaïs had come, showing her bleeding feet, and whilst he wept, she had slipped into his couch. There was no longer any doubt; the image of Thaïs was an impure image.

His heart filled with disgust, he leaped out of his

profaned couch, and hid his face in his hands that he might not see the daylight. The hours passed, but they did not remove his shame. All was quiet in the cell. For the first time for many long days, Paphnutius was alone. The phantom had at last left him, and even its absence seemed dreadful. Nothing, nothing to distract his mind from the recollection of the dream. Full of horror, he thought—

"Why did I not drive her away? Why did I not tear myself from her cold arms and burning knees?"

He no longer dared to pronounce the name of God near that horrible couch, and he feared that his cell being profaned, the demons might freely enter at any hour. His fears did not deceive him. The seven little jackals, which had never crossed the threshold, entered in a file, and went and hid under the bed. At the vesper hour, there came an eighth, the stench of which was horrible. The next day, a ninth joined the others, and soon there were thirty, then sixty, then eighty. They became smaller as they multiplied, and being no bigger than rats, they covered the floor, the couch, and the stool. One of them jumped on the little table by the side of the bed, and standing with its four feet together on the death's head, looked at the monk with burning eyes. And every day fresh jackals came.

To expiate the abominable sin of his dream, and flee from impure thoughts, Paphnutius determined to leave his cell, which had now become polluted, go far into the desert, and practise unheard-of austerities, strange labours, and fresh works of grace. But before putting his design into action, he went to see old Palemon and ask his advice.

He found him in his garden watering his lettuces. It was the evening. The blue Nile flowed at the foot of violet hills. The good old man was walking slowly, in order not to frighten a pigeon that had perched on his shoulder.

"The Lord be with thee, brother Paphnutius," he said. "Admire his goodness; He sends me the animals that He has created that I may converse with them of His works, and praise Him in the birds of the air. Look at this pigeon; note the changing hues of its neck, and say, is it not a beautiful work of God? But have you not come to talk with me, brother, on some pious subject? If so, I will put down my watering-pot, and listen to you."

Paphnutius told the old man about his journey, his return, the visions of his days and the dreams of his nights,—without omitting the sinful one—and the pack of jackals.

"Do you not think, father," he added, "that I ought to bury myself in the desert, and perform

some extraordinary austerities that would even astonish the devil?"

"I am but a poor sinner," replied Palemon, "and I know little about men, having passed all my life in this garden, with gazelles, little hares and pigeons. But it seems to me, brother, that your distemper comes from your having passed too suddenly from the noisy world to the calm of solitude. Such sudden transitions can but do harm to the health of the soul. You are, brother, like a man who exposes himself, almost at the same time, to great heat and great cold. A cough shakes him, and fever torments him. In your place, brother Paphnutius, instead of retiring at once into some awful desert, I should take such amusements as are fitting to a monk and a holy abbot. I should visit the monasteries in the neighbourhood. Some of them are wonderful, it is said. That of Abbot Serapion contains, I have been told, a thousand four hundred and thirty-two cells, and the monks are divided into as many legions as there are letters in the Greek alphabet. I am even informed that a certain analogy is observed between the character of the monks and the shape of the letter by which they are designated, and that, for example, those who are placed under Z have a tortuous character, whilst those under I have an upright mind. If I were you, brother, I should go

and assure myself of this with my own eyes, and I should know no rest until I had seen such a wonderful thing. I should not fail to study the regulations of the various communities which are scattered along the banks of the Nile, so as to be able to compare one with another. Such study is befitting a religious man like yourself. You have heard say, no doubt, that Abbot Ephrem has drawn up for his monastery pious regulations of great beauty. With his permission, you might make a copy of them, as you are a skilful penman. I could not do so, for my hands, accustomed to wield the spade, are too awkward to direct the thin reed of the scribe over the papyrus. But you have the knowledge of letters, brother, and should thank God for it, for beautiful writing cannot be too much admired. The work of the copyist and the reader is a great safeguard against evil thoughts. Brother Paphnutius, why do you not write out the teachings of our fathers, Paul and Anthony? Little by little you would recover, in these pious works, peace of soul and mind; solitude would again become pleasant to your heart, and soon you would be in a condition to recommence those ascetic works which your journey has interrupted. But you must not expect much benefit from excessive penitence. When he was amongst us, our Father Anthony used to say, 'Ex-

cessive fasting produces weakness, and weakness begets idleness. There are some monks who ruin their body by fasts improperly prolonged. Of them it may be said that they plunge a dagger into their own breast, and deliver themselves up unresistingly into the power of the devil.' So said the holy man, Anthony. I am but a foolish old man, but, by the grace of God, I have remembered what our father told us."

Paphnutius thanked Palemon and promised to think over his advice. When he had passed the fence of reeds which enclosed the little garden, he turned round and saw the good old gardener engaged in watering his salads, whilst the pigeon walked about on his bent back, and at that sight Paphnutius felt ready to weep.

On returning to his cell, he found there a strange turmoil, as though it were filled with grains of sand blown about by a strong wind, and on looking closer, he saw these moving bodies were myriads of little jackals. That night he saw in a dream, a high stone column surmounted by a human face, and he heard a voice which said—

"Ascend this pillar!"

On awaking, he felt confident that this dream had been sent from heaven. He called his disciples, and addressed them in these words—

"My beloved sons, I must leave you, and go where God sends me. During my absence obey Flavian as you would me, and take care of our brother Paul. Bless you. Farewell."

As he strode away, they remained prostrate on the ground, and when they raised their heads, they saw his tall dark figure on the sandy horizon.

He walked day and night until he reached the ruins of the temple, formerly built by the idolaters, in which he had slept amongst the scorpions and sirens on his former strange journey. The walls, covered with magic signs, were still standing. Thirty immense columns, which terminated in human heads or lotus flowers, still supported a heavy stone entablature. But, at one end of the temple, a pillar had shaken off its old burden, and stood isolated. It had for its capital the head of a woman which smiled, with long eyes and rounded cheeks, and on her forehead cow's horns.

Paphnutius, on seeing it, recognised the column which had been shown him in his dream, and he calculated that it was thirty-two cubits high. He went to the neighbouring village, and ordered a ladder of that height to be made; and when the ladder was placed against the pillar, he ascended, knelt down on the top, and said to the Lord—

"Here, then, O God, is the abode Thou hast

chosen for me. May I remain here, in Thy Grace, until the hour of my death."

He had brought no provisions with him, trusting in divine providence, and expecting that charitable peasants would give him all that he needed. And, in fact, the next day, about the ninth hour, women came with their children, bringing bread, dates, and fresh water, which the boys carried to the top of the column.

The top of the pillar was not large enough to allow the monk to lie at full length, so that he slept with his legs crossed and his head on his breast, and sleep was a more cruel torture to him than his wakeful hours. At dawn the ospreys brushed him with their wings, and he awoke filled with pain and terror.

It happened that the carpenter who had made the ladder feared God. Disturbed at the thought that the saint was exposed to the sun and rain, and fearing that he might fall in his sleep, this pious man constructed a roof and a railing on the top of the column.

Soon the report of this extraordinary existence spread from village to village, and the labourers of the valley came on Sundays, with their wives and children, to look at the stylite. The disciples of Paphnutius, having learned with surprise the place

of this wonderful retreat, came to him, and obtained from him permission to build their huts at the foot of the column. Every morning they came and stood in a circle round the master, and received from him the words of instruction.

"My sons," he said to them, "continue like those little children whom Jesus loved. That is the way of salvation. The sin of the flesh is the source and origin of all sins; they spring from it as from a parent. Pride, avarice, idleness, anger, and envy are its dearly beloved progeny. I have seen this in Alexandria; I have seen rich men carried away by the vice of lust, which, like a river with a turbid flood, swept them into the gulf of bitterness."

The abbots Ephrem and Serapion, being informed of his strange proceeding, wished to behold him with their own eyes. Seeing from afar, on the river, the triangular sail which was bringing them to him, Paphnutius could not prevent himself from thinking that God had made him an example to all solitary monks. The two abbots, when they saw him, did not conceal their surprise; and, having consulted together, they agreed in condemning such an extraordinary penance, and exhorted Paphnutius to come down.

"Such a mode of life is contrary to all usage," they said; "it is peculiar, and against all rules."

But Paphnutius replied—

"What is the monastic life if not peculiar? And ought not the deeds of a monk to be as eccentric as he is himself? It was a sign from God that caused me to ascend here; it is a sign from God that will make me descend."

Every day religious men came to join the disciples of Paphnutius, and they built for themselves shelters round the aerial hermitage. Several of them, to imitate the saint, mounted the ruins of the temple; but, being reproved by their brethren, and conquered by fatigue, they soon gave up these attempts.

Pilgrims flocked from all parts. There were some who had come long distances, and were hungry and thirsty. The idea occurred to a poor widow of selling fresh water and melons. Against the foot of the column, behind her bottles of red clay, her cups and her fruit under an awning of blue-and-white striped canvas, she cried, "Who wants to drink?" Following the example of this widow, a baker brought some bricks and made an oven close by, in the hope of selling loaves and cakes to visitors. As the crowd of visitors increased unceasingly, and the inhabitants of the large cities of Egypt began to come, some man, greedy of gain, built a caravanserai to lodge the guests and their servants, camels, and mules. Soon there was, in front of the column,

a market to which the fishermen of the Nile brought their fish, and the gardeners their vegetables. A barber, who shaved people in the open air, amused the crowd with his jokes. The old temple, so long given over to silence and solitude was filled with countless sights and sounds of life. The innkeepers turned the subterranean vaults into cellars and nailed on the old pillars signs surmounted by the figure of the holy Paphnutius, and bearing this inscription in Greek and Egyptian—*"Pomegranate wine, fig wine, and genuine Cilician beer sold here."* On the walls, sculptured with pure and graceful carvings, the shop-keepers hung ropes of onions, and smoked fish, dead hares, and the carcases of sheep. In the evening, the old occupants of the ruins, the rats, scuttled in a long row to the river, whilst the ibises, suspiciously craning their necks, perched on the high cornices, to which rose the smoke of the kitchens, the shouts of the drinkers, and the cries of the tapsters. All around, builders laid out streets, and masons constructed convents, chapels, and churches. By the end of six months a city was established with a guardhouse, a tribunal, a prison, and a school, kept by an old blind scribe.

The pilgrims were innumerable. Bishops and other Church dignitaries, came, full of admiration. The Patriarch of Antioch, who chanced to be in

Egypt at that time, came with all his clergy. He highly approved of the extraordinary conduct of the stylite, and the heads of the Libyan Church followed, in the absence of Athanasius, the opinion of the Patriarch. Having learned which, Abbots Ephrem and Serapion came to the feet of Paphnutius to apologise for their former mistrust. Paphnutius replied—

"Know, my brothers, that the penance I endure is barely equal to the temptations which are sent me, the number and force of which astound me. A man, viewed externally, is but small, and, from the height of the pillar to which God has called me, I see human beings moving about like ants. But, considered internally, man is immense; he is as large as the world, for he contains it. All that is spread before me—these monasteries, these inns, the boats on the river, the villages, and what I see in the distance of fields, canals, sand, and mountains—is nothing in respect to what is in me. I carry in my heart countless cities and illimitable deserts. And evil—evil and death—spread over this immensity, cover them all, as night covers the earth. I am, in myself alone, a universe of evil thoughts."

He spoke thus because the desire for woman was in him.

The seventh month, there came from Alexandria,

Bubastis and Saïs, women who had long been barren, hoping to obtain children by the intercession of the holy man and the virtues of his pillar. They rubbed their sterile bodies against the stone. There followed a procession, as far as the eye could reach, of chariots, palanquins, and litters, which stopped and pushed and jostled below the man of God. From them came sick people terrible to see. Mothers brought to Paphnutius young boys whose limbs were twisted, their eyes starting, their mouth foaming, their voices hoarse. He laid his hands upon them. Blind men approached, groping with their hands, and raising towards him a face pierced with two bleeding holes. Paralytics displayed before him the heavy immobility, the deadly emaciation, and the hideous contractions of their limbs; lame men showed him their club feet; women with cancer, holding their bosoms with both hands, uncovered before him their breasts devoured by the invisible vulture. Dropsical women, swollen like wine skins were placed on the ground before him. He blessed them. Nubians, afflicted with elephantiasis, advanced with heavy steps and looked at him with streaming eyes and expressionless countenances. He made the sign of the cross over them. A young girl of Aphroditopolis was brought to him on a litter; after having vomited blood, she had slept for

three days. She looked like a waxen image, and her parents, who thought she was dead, had placed a palm leaf on her breast. Paphnutius having prayed to God, the young girl raised her head and opened her eyes.

As the people reported everywhere the miracles which the saint had performed, unfortunate persons afflicted with that disease which the Greeks call "the divine malady," came from all parts of Egypt in incalculable legions. As soon as they saw the pillar, they were seized with convulsions, rolled on the ground, writhed, and twisted themselves into a ball. And—though it is hardly to be believed—the persons present were in their turn seized with a violent delirium, and imitated the contortions of the epileptics. Monks and pilgrims, men and women, wallowed and struggled pell-mell, their limbs twisted, foaming at the mouth, eating handfuls of earth and prophesying. And Paphnutius at the top of his pillar felt a thrill of horror pass through him, and cried to God—

"I am the scapegoat, and I take upon me all the impurities of these people, and that is why, Lord, my body is filled with evil spirits."

Every time that a sick person went away healed, the people applauded, carried him in triumph, and ceased not to repeat—

"We behold another well of Siloam!"

Hundreds of crutches already hung round the wonderful column; grateful women suspended wreaths and votive images there. Some of the Greeks inscribed distiches, and as every pilgrim carved his name, the stone was soon covered as high as a man could reach with an infinity of Latin, Greek, Coptic, Punic, Hebrew, Syrian, and magic characters.

When the feast of Easter came there was such an affluence of people to this city of miracles that old men thought that the days of the ancient mysteries had returned. All sorts of people, in all sorts of costumes, were to be seen there; the striped robes of the Egyptians, the burnoose of the Arabs, the white drawers of the Nubians, the short cloak of the Greeks, the long toga of the Romans, the scarlet breeches of the barbarians, the gold-spangled robes of the courtesans. A veiled woman would pass on an ass, preceded by black eunuchs, who cleared a passage for her by the free use of their sticks. Acrobats, having spread a carpet on the ground, juggled and performed skilful tricks before a circle of silent spectators. Snake-charmers unrolled their living girdles. A glittering, dusty, noisy, chattering crowd! The curses of the camel-drivers beating the animals; the cries of the hawkers who sold

amulets against leprosy and the evil eye; the psalmody of the monks reciting verses of the Bible; the shrieking of the women who were prophesying; the shouting of the beggars singing old songs of the harem; the bleating of sheep; the braying of asses; the sailors calling tardy passengers; all these confused noises caused a deafening uproar, over which dominated the strident voices of the little naked negro boys, running about everywhere selling fresh dates.

And all these human beings stifled under the white sky, in a heavy atmosphere laden with the perfumes of women, the odour of negroes, the fumes of cooking and the smoke of gums, which the devotees bought of the shepherds to burn before the saint.

When night came, fires, torches, and lanterns were lighted everywhere, and nothing was to be seen but red shadows and black shapes. Standing amidst a circle of squatting listeners, an old man, his face lighted by a smoky lamp, related how, formerly, Bitiou had enchanted his heart, torn it from his breast, placed it in an acacia, and then transformed himself into a tree. He made gestures, which his shadow repeated with absurd exaggerations, and the audience uttered cries of admiration. In the taverns, the drinkers, lying on couches, called

for beer and wine. Dancing girls, with painted eyes and bare stomachs, performed before them religious or lascivious scenes. In retired corners, young men played dice or other games, and old men followed prostitutes. Above all these rose the solitary, unchanging column; the head with the cow's horns gazed into the shadow, and above it Paphnutius watched between heaven and earth. All at once the moon rose over the Nile, like the bare shoulder of a goddess. The hills gleamed with blue light, and Paphnutius thought he saw the body of Thaïs shinning in the glimmer of the waters amidst the sapphire night.

The days passed, and the saint still lived on his pillar. When the rainy season came, the waters of heaven, filtering through the cracks in the roof, wetted his body; his stiff limbs were incapable of movement. Scorched by the sun, and reddened by the dew, his skin broke; large ulcers devoured his arms and legs. But the desire of Thaïs still consumed him inwardly, and he cried—

"It is not enough, great God! More temptations! More unclean thoughts! More horrible desires! Lord, lay upon me all the lusts of men, that I may expiate them all! Though it is false that the Greek bitch took upon herself all the sins of the world, as I heard an impostor once declare,

yet there is a hidden meaning in the fable, the truth of which I now recognise. For it is true that the sins of the people enter the soul of the saints, and are lost there as in a well. Thus it is that the souls of the just are polluted with more filth than is ever found in the soul of the sinner. And, for that reason, I praise Thee, O my God, for having made me the cesspool of the world."

One day, a rumour ran through the holy city, and even reached the ears of the hermit: a very great personage, a man occupying a high position, the Prefect of the Alexandrian fleet, Lucius Aurelius Cotta, was about to visit the city—was, indeed, now on his way.

The news was true. Old Cotta, who was inspecting the canals and the navigation of the Nile, had many times expressed a desire to see the stylite and the new city, to which the name of Stylopolis had been given. The Stylopolitans saw the river covered with sails one morning. Cotta appeared on board a golden galley hung with purple, and followed by all his fleet. He landed, and advanced, accompanied by a secretary carrying his tablets, and Aristæus, his physician, with whom he liked to converse.

A numerous suite walked behind him, and the shore was covered with *laticlaves* * and military

uniforms. He stopped, some paces from the column, and began to examine the stylite, wiping his face meanwhile with the skirt of his toga. Being of a naturally curious disposition, he had observed many things in the course of his long voyages. He liked to remember them, and intended to write, after he had finished his Punic history, a book on the remarkable things he had witnessed. He seemed much interested by the spectacle before him.

"This is very curious!" he said, puffing and blowing. "And—which is a circumstance worthy of being recorded—this man was my guest. Yes, this monk supped with me last year, after which he carried off an actress."

Turning to his secretary—

"Note that, my son, on my tablets; also the dimensions of the column, not omitting the shape of the top of it."

Then, wiping his face again—

"Persons deserving of belief have assured me that this monk has not left his column for a single moment since he mounted it a year ago. Is that possible, Aristæus?"

"That which is possible to a lunatic or a sick

* The *laticlave* was a toga, with a broad purple band, worn by Roman senators as the distinguishing mark of their high office.

man," replied Aristæus, "would be impossible to a man sound in body and mind. Do you know, Lucius, that sometimes diseases of the mind or body give to those afflicted by them a strength which healthy men do not possess? For, as a matter of fact, there is no such thing as good health or bad health. There are only different conditions of the organs. Having studied what are called maladies, I have come to consider them as necessary forms of life. I take pleasure in studying them in order to be able to conquer them. Some of them are worthy of admiration, and conceal, under apparent disorder, profound harmonies; for instance, a quartan fever is certainly a very pretty thing! Sometimes certain affections of the body cause a rapid augmentation of the faculties of the mind. You know Creon? When he was a child, he stuttered and was stupid. But, having cracked his skull by tumbling off a ladder, he became an able lawyer, as you are aware. This monk must be affected in some hidden organ. Moreover, this kind of existence is not so extraordinary as it appears to you, Lucius. I may remind you that the gymnosophists of India can remain motionless, not merely for a year, but during twenty, thirty, or forty years."

"By Jupiter!" cried Cotta, "that is a strange madness. For man was born to move and act, and

idleness is an unpardonable crime, because it is an injury to the State. I do not know of any religion in which such an objectionable practice is permitted, though it possibly may be in some of the Asiatic creeds. When I was Governor of Syria, I found *phalli* erected in the porches at the city of Hera. A man ascended, twice a year, and remained there for a week. The people believed that this man talked with the gods, and interceded with them for the prosperity of Syria. The custom appeared senseless to me; nevertheless I did nothing to put it down. For I consider that a functionary ought not to interfere with the manners and customs of the people, but on the contrary, to see that they are preserved. It is not the business of the government to force a religion on a people, but to maintain that which exists, which, whether good or bad, has been regulated by the spirit of the time, the place, and the race. If it endeavours to put down a religion, it proclaims itself revolutionary in its spirit, and tyrannical in its acts, and is justly detested. Besides, how are you to raise yourself above the superstitions of the vulgar, except by understanding them and tolerating them? Aristæus, I am of opinion that I should leave this nephelo-coccygian * in the air, ex-

* Nephelo-coccygia, the cloud-city built by the cuckoos, in the *Birds* of Aristophanes.

posed only to the indignities the birds shower on him. I should not gain anything by having him pulled down, but I should by taking note of his thoughts and beliefs."

He puffed, coughed, and placed his hand on the secretary's shoulder.

"My child, note down that, amongst certain sects of Christians, it is considered praiseworthy to carry off courtesans and live upon columns. You may add that these customs are evidence of the worship of genetic divinities. But on this point we ought to question him himself."

Then, raising his head, and shading his eyes with his hand, to keep off the sun, he shouted—

"Hallo, Paphnutius! If you remember that you were once my guest, answer me. What are you doing up there? Why did you go up, and why do you stay there? Has this column any phallic signification in your mind?"

Paphnutius, considering Cotta as nothing but an idolater, did not deign to reply. But his disciple, Flavian, approached, and said—

"Illustrious Sir, this holy man takes the sins of the world upon him, and cures diseases."

"By Jupiter! Do you hear, Aristæus?" cried Cotta. "This nephelo-coccygian practises medicine, like you. What do you think of so high a rival?"

Aristæus shook his head.

"It is very possible that he may cure certain diseases better than I can; such, for instance, as epilepsy, vulgarly called the divine malady, although all maladies are equally divine, for they all come from the gods. But the cause of this disease lies, partly, in the imagination, and you must confess, Lucius, that this monk, perched up on the head of a goddess, strikes the minds of the sick people more forcibly than I, bending over my mortars and phials in my laboratory, could ever do. There are forces, Lucius, infinitely more powerful than reason and science."

"What are they?" asked Cotta.

"Ignorance and folly," replied Aristæus.

"I have rarely seen a more curious sight," continued Cotta, "and I hope that some day an able writer will relate the foundation of Stylopolis. But even the most extraordinary spectacles should not keep, longer than is befitting, a serious and busy man from his work. Let us go and inspect the canals. Farewell, good Paphnutius! or rather, till our next meeting! If ever you should come down to earth again, and revisit Alexandria, do not fail to come and sup with me."

These words, heard by all present, passed from mouth to mouth, and being repeated by the be-

lievers, added greatly to the reputation of Paphnutius. Pious minds amplified and transformed them, and it was stated that Paphnutius, from the top of his pillar, had converted the Prefect of the Fleet to the faith of the apostles and the Nicæan fathers. The believers found a figurative meaning in the last words uttered by Aurelius Cotta; to them, the supper to which this important personage had invited the ascetic, was a holy communion, a spiritual repast, a celestial banquet. The story of this meeting was embroidered with wonderful details, which those who invented were the first to believe. It was said that when Cotta, after a long argument, had embraced the truth, an angel had come from heaven to wipe the sweat from his brow. The physician and secretary of the Prefect of the Fleet had also, it was asserted, been converted at the same time. And, the miracle being public and notorious, the deacons of the principal churches of Libya recorded it amongst the authentic facts. After that, it could be said, without any exaggeration, that the whole world was seized with a desire to see Paphnutius, and that, in the West as well as the East, all Christians turned their astonished eyes towards him. The most celebrated cities of Italy sent deputations to him, and the Roman Cæsar, the divine Constantine, who favoured the

Christian religion, wrote him a letter which the legates brought to him with great ceremony. But one night, whilst the budding city at his feet slept in the dew, he heard a voice, which said—

"Paphnutius, thou art become celebrated by thy works and powerful by thy word. God has raised thee up for His glory. He has chosen thee to work miracles, heal the sick, convert the Pagans, enlighten sinners, confound the Arians, and establish peace in the Church."

Paphnutius replied—

"God's will be done!"

The voice continued—

"Arise, Paphnutius, and go seek in his palace the impious Constans, who, far from imitating the wisdom of his brother, Constantine, inclines to the errors of Arius and Marcus. Go! The bronze gates shall fly open before thee, and thy sandals shall resound on the golden floor of the basilica before the throne of the Cæsars, and thy awe-inspiring voice shall change the heart of the son of Constantinus. Thou shalt reign over a peaceful and powerful Church. And, even as the soul directs the body, so shall the Church govern the empire. Thou shalt be placed above senators, comites, and patricians. Thou shalt repress the greed of the people, and check the boldness of the barbarians.

Old Cotta, knowing that thou art the head of the government, will seek the honour of washing thy feet. At the death thy *cilicium* shall be taken to the patriarch of Alexandria, and the great Athanasius, white with glory, shall kiss it as the relic of a saint. Go!"

Paphnutius replied—

"Let the will of God be accomplished!"

And making an effort to stand up, he prepared to descend. But the voice, divining his intention, said—

"Above all, descend not by the ladder. That would be to act like an ordinary man, and to be unconscious of the gifts that are in thee. A great saint, like thee, ought to fly through the air. Leap! the angels are there to support thee. Leap, then!"

Paphnutius replied—

"The will of God be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Extending his long arms like the ragged wings of a huge sick bird, he was about to throw himself down, when, suddenly, a hideous mocking laugh rang in his ears. Terrified, he asked—

"Who laughs thus?"

"Ah? ah!" screamed the voice, "we are yet but at the beginning of our friendship; thou wilt some day be better acquainted with me. My friend, it

was I who caused thee to ascend here, and I ought to be satisfied at the docility with which thou hast accomplished my wishes. Paphnutius, I am pleased with thee."

Paphnutius murmured, in a voice stifled by fear—

"Avaunt, avaunt! I know thee now; thou art he who carried Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple, and showed him all the kingdoms of this world."

He fell, affrighted, on the stone.

"Why did I not know this sooner?" he thought. "More wretched than the blind, deaf, and paralysed who trust in me, I have lost all knowledge of things supernatural, and am more depraved than the maniacs who eat earth and approach dead bodies. I can no longer distinguish between the clamours of hell and the voices of heaven. I have lost even the intuition of the new-born child, who cries when its nurse's breast is taken from it, of the dog that scents out its master's footsteps, of the plant that turns towards the sun. I am the laughing-stock of the devils. So, then, it is Satan who led me here. When he elevated me on this pedestal, lust and pride mounted with me. It is not the magnitude of my temptations which terrifies me. Anthony, on his mountain, suffers the same. I wish that all their swords may pierce my flesh, before the eyes of the angels. I have even learned to like my sufferings.

But God does not speak to me, and His silence astonishes me. He has left me—and I had but Him to look to. He leaves me alone in the horror of His absence. He flies from me. I will follow after Him. This stone burns my feet. Let me leave quickly, and come up with God."

With that he seized the ladder which stood against the column, put his feet on it, and having descended a rung, found himself face to face with the monster's head; she smiled strangely. He was certain then that what he had taken for the site of his rest and glory, was but the diabolical instrument of his trouble and damnation. He hastily descended and touched the soil. His feet had forgotten their use, and he reeled. But, feeling on him the shadow of the cursed column, he forced himself to run. All slept. He traversed, without being seen, the great square surrounded by wine-shops, inns, and caravanserias, and threw himself into a by-street which led towards the Libyan Hills. A dog pursued him, barking, and stopped only at the edge of the desert. Paphnutius went through a country where there was no road but the trail of wild beasts. Leaving behind him the huts abandoned by the coiners, he continued all night and all day his solitary flight.

At last, almost ready to expire with hunger, thirst,

and fatigue, and not knowing if God was still far from him, he came to a silent city which extended from right to left, and stretched away till it was lost in the blue horizon. The buildings, which were widely separated and like each other, resembled, pyramids cut off at half their height. They were tombs. The doors were broken, and in the shadow of the chambers could be seen the gleaming eyes of hyænas and wolves who brought forth their young there, whilst the dead bodies lay on the threshold, despoiled by robbers, and gnawed by the wild beasts. Having passed through this funeral city, Paphnutius fell exhausted before a tomb which stood near a spring surrounded by palm trees. This tomb was much ornamented, and, as there was no door to it, he saw inside it a painted chamber, in which serpents bred.

"Here," he sighed, "is the abode I have chosen; the tabernacle of my repentance and penitence."

He dragged himself to it, drove out the reptiles with his feet, and remained prostrate on the stone floor for eighteen hours, at the end of which time he went to the spring, and drank out of his hand. Then he plucked some dates and some stalks of lotus, the seeds of which he ate. Thinking this kind of life was good, he made it the rule of his existence.

From morning to night he never lifted his forehead from the stone.

One day, whilst he was thus prostrated, he heard a voice which said—

"Look at these images, that thou mayest learn."

Then, raising his head, he saw, on the walls of the chamber, paintings which represented lively and domestic scenes. They were of very old work, and marvellously lifelike. There were cooks who blew the fire, with their cheeks all puffed out; others plucked geese, or cooked quarters of sheep in stew-pans. A little farther, a hunter carried on his shoulders a gazelle pierced with arrows. In one place, peasants were sowing, reaping, or gathering. In another, women danced to the sounds of viols, flutes, and harp. A young girl played the theorbo. The lotus flower shone in her hair, which was neatly braided. Her transparent dress let the pure forms of her body be seen. Her bosom and mouth were perfect. The face was turned in profile, and the beautiful eye looked straight before her. The whole figure was exquisite. Paphnutius having examined it, lowered his eyes, and replied to the voice—

"Why dost thou command me to look at these images? No doubt they represent the terrestrial

life of the idolater whose body rests here, under my feet, at the bottom of a well, in a coffin of black basalt. They recall the life of a dead man, and are, despite their bright colours, the shadows of a shadow. The life of a dead man! O vanity!"

"He is dead, but he lived," replied the voice; "and thou wilt die, and wilt not have lived."

From that day, Paphnutius had not a moment's rest. The voice spoke to him incessantly. The girl with the theorbo looked fixedly at him from underneath the long lashes of her eye. At last she also spoke—

"Look. I am mysterious and beautiful. Love me. Exhaust in my arms the love which torments you. What use is it to fear me? You cannot escape me; I am the beauty of woman. Whither do you think to fly from me, senseless fool? You will find my likeness in the radiancy of flowers, and in the grace of the palm trees, in the flight of pigeons, in the bounds of the gazelle, in the rippling of brooks, in the soft light of the moon, and if you close your eyes, you will find me within yourself. It is a thousand years since the man who sleeps here, swathed in linen, in a bed of black stone, pressed me to his heart. It is a thousand years since he received the last kiss from my mouth, and his sleep is yet redolent with it. You know me well, Paph-

nutius. How is it you have not recognised me? I am one of the innumerable incarnations of Thaïs. You are a learned monk, and well skilled in the knowledge of things. You have travelled, and it is by travel a man learns the most. Often a day passed abroad will show more novelties than ten years passed at home. You have heard that Thaïs lived formerly in Argos, under the name of Helen. She had another existence in Thebes Hecatompyle. And I was Thaïs of Thebes. How is it you have not guessed it? I took, when I was alive, a large share in the sins of this world, and now reduced here to the condition of a shadow, I am still quite capable of taking your sins upon me, beloved monk. Whence comes your surprise? It was certain that, wherever you went, you would find Thaïs again."

He struck his forehead against the pavement, and uttered a cry of terror. And every night the player of the theorbo left the wall, approached him, and spoke in a clear voice mingled with soft breathing. And as the holy man resisted the temptations she gave him, she said to him—

"Love me; yield, friend. As long as you resist me I shall torment you. You do not know what the patience of a dead woman is. I shall wait, if necessary, till you are dead. Being a sorceress, I shall put into your lifeless body a spirit who will re-

animate it, and who will not refuse me what I have asked in vain of you. And think, Paphnutius, what a strange situation when your blessed soul sees, from the height of heaven, its own body given up to sin. God, who has promised to return you this body after the day of judgment and the end of time, will Himself be much puzzled. How can He place in celestial glory a human form inhabited by a devil, and guarded by a sorceress? You have not thought of that difficulty. Nor God either, perhaps. Between ourselves, He is not very knowing. Any ordinary magician can easily deceive Him, and if He had not His thunder, and the cataracts of heaven, the village urchins would pull His beard. He has certainly not as much sense as the old serpent, His adversary. *He,* indeed, is a wonderful artist. If I am so beautiful, it is because he adorned me with all my attractions. It was he who taught me how to braid my hair, and to make for myself rosy fingers with agate nails. You have misunderstood him. When you came to live in this tomb, you drove out with your feet the serpents which were here, without troubling yourself to know whether they were of his family, and you crushed their eggs. I am afraid, my poor friend, you will have a troublesome business on your hands. You were warned, however, that he was a musician and a lover. What

have you done? You have quarrelled with science and beauty. You are altogether miserable, and Iaveh does not come to your help. It is not probable that he will come. Being as great as all things, he cannot move for want of space, and if, by an impossibility, he made the least movement, all creation would be pushed out of place. My handsome hermit, give me a kiss."

Paphnutius was aware that great prodigies are performed by magic arts. He thought—not without much uneasiness—

"Perhaps the dead man buried at my feet knows the words written in that mysterious book which exists hidden, not far from here, at the bottom of a royal tomb. By virtue of these words, the dead, taking the form which they had upon earth, see the light of the sun and the smiles of women."

His chief fear was that the girl with the theorbo and the dead man might come together, as they did in their lifetime, and that he should see them unite. Sometimes he thought he heard the sound of kissing.

He was troubled in his mind, and now, in the absence of God he feared to think as much as to feel. One evening, when he was kneeling prostrate according to his custom, an unknown voice said to him—

"Paphnutius, there are on earth more people than you imagine, and if I were to show you what I have seen, you would die of astonishment. There are men with a single eye in the middle of their forehead. There are men who have but one leg, and advance by jumps. There are men who change their sex, and the females become males. There are men-trees, who shoot out roots in the ground. And there are men with no head, with two eyes, a nose, and a mouth in their breast. Can you honestly believe that Jesus Christ died for the salvation of these men?"

Another time he had a vision. He saw, in a strong light, a broad road, rivulets, and gardens. On the road, Aristobulus and Chereas passed at a gallop on their Syrian horses, and the joyous ardour of the race reddened the cheeks of the two young men. Beneath a portico, Callicrates recited his verses; satisfied pride trembled in his voice and shone in his eyes. In the garden, Zenothemis picked apples of gold, and caressed a serpent with azure wings. Clad in white, and wearing a shining mitre, Hermodorus meditated beneath a sacred persea, which bore, instead of flowers, small heads of pure profile, wearing, like the Egyptian goddesses, vultures, hawks, or the shining disk of the moon; whilst

in the background, by the side of a fountain, Nicias studied, on an armillary sphere, the harmonious movements of the stars.

Then a veiled woman approached the monk, holding in her hand a branch of myrtle. She said to him—

"Look! Some seek eternal beauty, and place their ephemeral life in the infinite. Others live without much thought. But by that alone they submit to fair Nature, and they are happy and beautiful in the joy of living only, and give glory to the supreme artist of all things; for man is a noble hymn to God. All think that happiness is innocent, and that pleasure is permitted to man. Paphnutius, if they are right, what a dupe you have been!"

And the vision vanished.

Thus was Paphnutius tempted unceasingly in body and mind. Satan never gave him a minute's repose. The solitude of the tomb was more peopled than the streets of a great city. The devils shouted with laughter, and millions of imps, evil genii, and phantoms imitated all the ordinary transactions of life. In the evening, when he went to the spring, satyrs and nymphs capered round him, and tried to drag him into their lascivious dances. The demons no longer feared him. They loaded him with insults,

obscene jests, and blows. One day a devil, no longer than his arm, stole the cord he wore round his waist.

He said to himself—

"Thought, whither hast thou led me?"

And he resolved to work with his hands, in order to give his mind that rest of which it had need. Near the spring, some banana trees, with large leaves, grew under the shade of the palms. He cut the stalks, and carried them to the tomb. He crushed them with a stone, and reduced them to fibres, as he had seen ropemakers do. For he intended to make a cord, to replace that which the devil had stolen. The demons were somewhat displeased at this; they ceased their clamour, and the girl with the theorbo no longer continued her magic arts, but remained quietly on the wall. The courage and faith of Paphnutius increased whilst he pounded the banana stems.

"With Heaven's help," he said to himself, "I shall subdue the flesh. As to my soul, its confidence is still unshaken. In vain do the devils, and that accursed woman, try to instil into my mind doubts as to the nature of God. I will reply to them, by the mouth of the Apostle John, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.' That I

firmly believe, and that which I believe is absurd, I believe still more firmly. In fact it should be absurd. If it were not so, I should not *believe;* I should *know.* And it is not that which we know which gives eternal life; it is faith only that saves."

He exposed the separated fibres to the sun and the dew, and every morning he took care to turn them, to prevent them rotting; and he rejoiced to find that he had become as simple as a child. When he had twisted his cord, he cut reeds to make mats and baskets. The sepulchral chamber resembled a basket-maker's workshop, and Paphnutius could pass without difficulty from work to prayer. Yet still God was not merciful to him, for one night he was awakened by a voice which froze him with horror, for he guessed that it was the voice of the dead man.

The voice called quickly, in a light whisper—

"Helen! Helen! come and bathe with me! come quickly!"

A woman, whose mouth was close to the monk's ear, replied—

"Friend, I cannot rise; a man is lying on me."

Paphnutius suddenly perceived that his cheek rested on a woman's breast. He recognised the player of the theorbo, who, partly relieved of his

weight, raised her breast. He clung tightly to the sweet, warm, perfumed body, and consumed with the desire of damnation, he cried—

"Stay, stay, my heavenly one!"

But she was already standing on the threshold. She laughed, and her smile gleamed in the silver rays of the moon.

"Why should I stay?" she said. "The shadow of a shadow is enough for a lover endowed with such a lively imagination. Besides, you have sinned. What more was needed?"

Paphnutius wept in the night, and when the dawn came, he murmured a prayer that was a meek complaint—

"Jesus, my Jesus, why hast Thou forsaken me? Thou seest the danger in which I am. Come, and help me, sweet Saviour. Since Thy Father no longer loves me, and does not hear me, remember that I have but Thee. From Him nothing is to be hoped; I cannot comprehend Him, and He cannot pity me. But thou was born of a woman, and that is why I trust in Thee. Remember that Thou wast a man. I pray to Thee, not because Thou art God of God, Light of light, very God of very God, but because Thou hast lived poor and humble on this earth where now I suffer, because Satan has tempted Thy flesh, because the sweat of agony has bedewed

Thy face. It is to Thy humanity that I pray, Jesus, my brother Jesus!"

When he had thus prayed, wringing his hands, a terrible peal of laughter shook the walls of the tomb, and the voice which rang in his ears on the top of the column, said jeeringly—

"That is a prayer worthy of the breviary of Marcus, the heretic. Paphnutius is an Arian! Paphnutius is an Arian!"

As though thunderstruck, the monk fell senseless.

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When he reopened his eyes, he saw around him monks wearing black hoods, who poured water on his temples, and recited exorcisms. Many others were standing outside, carrying palm leaves.

"As we passed through the desert," said one of them, "we heard cries issuing from this tomb, and, having entered, we found you lying unconscious on the floor. Doubtless the devils had thrown you down, and had fled at our approach."

Paphnutius, raising his head, asked in a feeble voice—

"Who are you, my brothers? And why do you carry palms in your hands? Is it for my burial?"

One of them replied—

"Brother, do you not know that our father, Anthony, now a hundred and five years old, having been

warned of his approaching end, has come down from Mount Colzin, to which he had retired, to bless his numerous spiritual children? We are going with palm leaves to greet our holy father. But how is it, brother, that you are ignorant of such a great event? Can it be possible that no angel came to this tomb to inform you?"

"Alas!" replied Paphnutius, "I am not worthy of such a favour, and the only denizens of this abode are demons and vampires. Pray for me. I am Paphnutius, Abbot of Antinoë, the most wretched of the servants of God."

At the name of Paphnutius, all waved their palm leaves and murmured his praises. The monk who had previously spoken, cried in surprise—

"Can it be that thou art that holy Paphnutius, celebrated for so many works that it was supposed he would some day equal the great Anthony himself? Most venerable, it was thou who convertedst to God the courtesan, Thaïs, and who, raised upon a high column, was carried away by the seraphs. Those who watched by night, at the foot of the pillar, saw thy blessed assumption. The wings of the angels encircled thee in a white cloud, and with thy right hand extended thou didst bless the dwellings of man. The next day, when the people saw thou wert no longer there, a long groan rose to the

summit of the discrowned pillar. But Flavian, thy disciple, reported the miracle, and took thy place as the head. But a foolish man, of the name of Paul, tried to contradict the general opinion. He asserted that he had seen thee, in a dream, carried away by the devils; the people wanted to stone him, and it was a miracle that he escaped death. I am Zozimus, abbot of these solitary monks whom thou seest prostrate at thy feet. Like them, I kneel before thee, that thou mayest bless the father with the children. Then thou shalt relate to us the marvels which God has deigned to accomplish by thy means."

"Far from having favoured me as thou believest," replied Paphnutius, "the Lord has tried me with terrible temptations. I was not carried away by angels. But a shadowy wall is raised in front of my eyes, and moves before me. I have lived in a dream. Without God all is a dream. When I made my journey to Alexandria, I heard, in a short space of time, many discourses, and I learned that the army of errors was innumerable. It pursues me, and I am compassed about with swords."

Zozimus replied—

"Venerable father, we must remember that the saints, and especially the solitary saints, undergo terrible trials. If thou wast not carried to heaven

by the seraphs, it is certain that the Lord granted that favour of thy image, for Flavian, the monks, and the people were witnesses of thy assumption."

Paphnutius resolved to go and receive the blessing of Anthony.

"Brother Zozimus," he said, "give me one of these palm leaves, and let us go and meet our father."

"Let us go," replied Zozimus; "military order is most befitting for monks, who are God's soldiers. Thou and I, being abbots, will march in front, and the others shall follow us, singing psalms."

They set out on their march, and Paphnutius said—

"God is unity, for He is the truth, which is one. The world is many, because it is error. We should turn away from all the sights of nature, even those which appear the most innocent. Their diversity renders them pleasant, which is a sign that they are evil. For that reason, I cannot see a tuft of papyrus by the side of still waters without my soul being imbued with melancholy. All things that the senses perceive are detestable. The least grain of sand brings danger. Everything tempts us. Woman is but a combination of all the temptations scattered in the thin air, on the flowering earth, in the clear waters. Happy is he whose soul is a sealed vase!

Happy is he who knows how to be deaf, dumb, and blind, and who knows nothing of the world, in order that he may know God!"

Zozimus, having meditated upon these words, replied as follows—

"Venerable father, it is fitting that I should avow my sins to thee, since thou hast shown me thy soul. Thus we shall confess to each other, according to the apostolic custom. Before I was a monk, I led an abominable life. At Madaura, a city celebrated for its courtesans, I sought out all kinds of worldly love. Every night I supped in company with young debauchees and female flute players, and I took home with me the one who pleased me the best. A saint like thee could never imagine to what a pitch the fury of my desires carried me. Suffice it to say that it spared neither matrons nor nuns, and spread adultery and sacrilege everywhere. I excited my senses with wine, and was justly known as the heaviest drinker in Madaura. Yet I was a Christian, and, in all my follies, kept my faith in Jesus crucified. Having devoured my substance in riotous living, I was beginning to feel the first attacks of poverty, when I saw one of my companions in pleasure suddenly struck with a terrible disease. His knees could not sustain him; his twitching hands refused to obey him; his glazed eyes closed. Only horrible

groans came from his breast. His mind, heavier than his body, slumbered. To punish him for having lived like a beast, God had changed him into a beast. The loss of my property had already inspired me with salutary reflections; but the example of my friend was of yet greater efficacy; it made such an impression on my heart that I quitted the world and retired into the desert. There I have enjoyed for twenty years a peace that nothing has troubled. I work with my monks as weaver, architect, carpenter, and even as scribe, though, to say the truth, I have little taste for writing, having always preferred action to thought. My days are full of joy, and my nights without dreams, and I believe that the grace of the Lord is in me, because, even in the midst of the most frightful sins, I have never lost hope."

On hearing these words, Paphnutius lifted his eyes to heaven and murmured—

"Lord, Thou lookest with kindness upon this man polluted by adultery, sacrilege, and so many crimes, and Thou turnest away from me, who have always kept Thy commandments! How inscrutable is Thy justice, O my God! and how impenetrable are Thy ways!"

Zozimus extended his arms.

"Look, venerable father! On both sides of the horizon are long, black files that look like emigrant ants. They are our brothers, who, like us, are going to meet Anthony."

When they came to the place of meeting, they saw a magnificent spectacle. The army of monks extended, in three ranks, in an immense semicircle. In the first rank stood the old hermits of the desert, cross in hand, and with long beards that almost touched the ground. The monks, governed by the abbots Ephrem and Serapion, and also all the cenobites of the Nile, formed the second line. Behind them appeared the ascetics, who had come from their distant rocks. Some wore, on their blackened and dried-up bodies, shapeless rags; others had for their only clothes, bundles of reeds held together by withies. Many of them were naked, but God had covered them with a fell of hair as thick as a sheep's fleece. All held branches of palm; they looked like an emerald rainbow, or they might have been also compared to the host of the elect—the living walls of the city of God.

Such perfect order reigned in the assembly, that Paphnutius found, without difficulty, the monks he governed. He placed himself near them, after having taken care to hide his face under his hood,

that he might remain unknown, and not disturb them in their pious expectation. Suddenly, an immense shout arose—

"The saint!" they all cried. "The saint! Behold the great saint, against whom hell has not prevailed, the well-beloved of God! Our father, Anthony!"

Then a great silence followed, and every forehead was lowered to the sand.

From the summit of a dune, in the vast void space, Anthony advanced, supported by his beloved disciples, Macarius and Amathas. He walked slowly, but his figure was still upright, and showed the remains of a superhuman strength. His white beard spread over his broad chest, his polished skull reflected the rays of sunlight like the forehead of Moses. The keen gaze of the eagle was in his eyes; the smile of a child shone on his round cheek. To bless his people, he raised his arms, tired by a century of marvellous works, and his voice burst forth for the last time, with the words of love.

"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!"

Immediately, from one end to the other of the living wall, like a peal of harmonious thunder, the psalm, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord," broke forth.

Accompanied by Macarius and Amathas, Anthony passed along the ranks of the old hermits, anchorites, and cenobites. This seer, who had beheld heaven and hell; this hermit, who from a cave in the rock, governed the Christian Church; this saint, who had sustained the faith of the martyrs; this scholar, whose eloquence had paralysed the heretics, spoke tenderly to each of his sons, and bade them a kindly farewell, on the eve of the blessed death, which God, who loved him, had at last promised him.

He said to the abbots Ephrem and Serapion—

"You command large armies, and you are both great generals. Therefore, you shall put on in heaven an armour of gold, and the Archangel Michael shall give you the title of kiliarchs of his hosts."

Perceiving the old man Philemon, he embraced him, and said—

"Behold, the kindest and best of all my children. His soul exhales a perfume as sweet as the flower of the beans he sows every year."

To Abbot Zozimus he addressed these words—

"Thou hast never mistrusted divine goodness, and therefore the peace of the Lord is in thee. The lily of thy virtues has flowered upon the dunghill of thy corruption."

To all he spoke words of unerring wisdom.

To the old hermits he said—

"The apostle saw, round the throne of God, eighty old men seated, clad in white robes, and wearing crowns on their heads."

To the young men—

"Be joyful; leave sadness to the happy ones of this world."

Thus he passed along the front of his filial army, exhorting and comforting. Paphnutius, seeing him approach, fell on his knees, his heart torn by fear and hope.

"My father! my father!" he cried in his agony. "My father! come to my help, for I perish. I have given to God the soul of Thaïs; I have lived upon the top of a column, and in the chamber of a tomb. My forehead, unceasingly in the dust, has become horny as a camel's knee. And yet God has gone from me. Bless me, my father, and I shall be saved; shake the hyssop, and I shall be washed, and I shall shine as the snow."

Anthony did not reply. He turned to the monks of Antinoë those eyes whose looks no man could sustain. He gazed for a long time at Paul, called the Fool; then he made a sign to him to approach. And, as all were astonished that the saint should address himself to a man who was not in his senses, Anthony said—

"God has granted to him more grace than to any

of you. Lift thy eyes, my son Paul, and tell me what thou seest in heaven."

Paul the Fool raised his eyes; his face shone, and his tongue was unloosed.

"I see in heaven," he said, "a bed adorned with hangings of purple and gold. Around it three virgins keep constant watch that no soul may approach it, except the chosen one for whom the bed is prepared."

Believing that this bed was the symbol of his glorification, Paphnutius had already begun to return thanks to God. But Anthony made a sign to him to be silent, and to listen to the Fool, who murmured in his ecstasy—

"The three virgins speak to me; they say unto me: 'A saint is about to quit the earth; Thaïs of Alexandria is dying. And we have prepared the bed of her glory, for we are her virtues—Faith, Fear, and Love.' "

Anthony asked—

"Sweet child, what else seest thou?"

Paul gazed vacantly from the zenith to the nadir, and from west to east, when suddenly his eyes fell on the Abbot of Antinoë. His face grew pale with a holy terror, and his eyeballs reflected invisible flames.

"I see," he murmured, "three demons, who, full

of joy, prepare to seize that man. One of them is like unto a tower, one to a woman, and one to a mage. All three bear their name, marked with red-hot iron; the first on the forehead, the second on the belly, the third on the breast, and those names are—Pride, Lust, and Doubt. I have finished."

Having spoken thus, Paul, with haggard eyes and hanging jaw, returned to his old simple ways.

And, as the monks of Antinoë looked anxiously at Anthony, the saint pronounced these words—

"God has made known His just judgment. Let us bow to Him and hold our peace."

He passed. He bestowed blessings as he went. The sun, now descended to the horizon, enveloped him in its glory, and his shadow, immeasurably elongated by a miracle from heaven, unrolled itself behind him like an endless carpet, as a sign of the long remembrance this great saint would leave amongst men.

Upright, but thunderstruck, Paphnutius saw and heard nothing more. One word alone rang in his ears, "Thaïs is dying!" The thought had never occurred to him. Twenty years had he contemplated a mummy's head, and yet the idea that death would close the eyes of Thaïs astonished him hopelessly.

"Thaïs is dying!" An incomprehensible saying!

"Thaïs is dying!" In those three words what a new and terrible sense! "Thaïs is dying!" Then why the sun, the flowers, the brooks, and all creation? "Thaïs is dying!" What good was all the universe? Suddenly he sprang forward. "To see her again, to see her once more!" He began to run. He knew not where he was, or whither he went, but instinct conducted him with unerring certainty; he went straight to the Nile. A swarm of sails covered the upper waters of the river. He sprang on board a barque manned by Nubians, and lying in the forepart of the boat, his eyes devouring space, he cried, in grief and rage—

"Fool, fool, that I was, not to have possessed Thaïs whilst there was yet time! Fool to have believed that there was anything else in the world but her! Oh, madness! I dreamed of God, of the salvation of my soul, of life eternal—as if all that counted for anything when I had seen Thaïs! Why did I not feel that blessed eternity was in a single kiss of that woman, and that without her life was senseless, and no more than an evil dream? Oh, stupid fool! thou hast seen her, and thou hast desired the good things of the other world! Oh, coward! thou hast seen her, and thou hast feared God! God! heaven! what are they? And what have they to offer thee which are worth the least

tittle of that which she would have given thee? Oh, miserable, senseless fool, who sought divine goodness elsewhere than on the lips of Thaïs! What hand was upon thy eyes? Cursed be he who blinded thee then! Thou couldst have bought, at the price of thy damnation, one moment of her love, and thou hast not done it! She opened to thee her arms—flesh mingled with the perfume of flowers—and thou wast not engulfed in the unspeakable enchantments of her unveiled breast. Thou hast listened to the jealous voice which said to thee, 'Refrain!' Dupe, dupe, miserable dupe! Oh, regrets! Oh, remorse! Oh, despair! Not to have the joy to carry to hell the memory of that never-to-be-forgotten hour, and to cry to God, 'Burn my flesh, dry up all the blood in my veins, break all my bones, thou canst not take from me the remembrance which sweetens and refreshes me for ever and ever!' . . . Thaïs is dying! Preposterous God, if thou knewest how I laugh at Thy hell! Thaïs is dying, and she will never be mine—never! never!"

And as the boat came down the river with the current, he remained whole days lying on his face, and repeating—

"Never! never! never!"

Then, at the idea that she had given herself to others, and not to him; that she had poured forth

an ocean of love, and he had not wetted his lips therein, he stood up, savagely wild, and howled with grief. He tore his breast with his nails, and bit the flesh of his arms. He thought—

"If I could but kill all those she has loved!"

The idea of these murders filled him with delicious fury. He dreamed of killing Nicias slowly and leisurely, looking him full in the eyes whilst he murdered him. Then suddenly his fury melted away. He wept, he sobbed. He became feeble and meek. An unknown tenderness softened his soul. He longed to throw his arms round the neck of the companion of his childhood, and say to him, "Nicias, I love thee, because thou hast loved her. Talk to me about her. Tell me what she said to thee." And still, without ceasing, the iron of that phrase entered into his soul—"Thaïs is dying!"

"Light of day, silvery shadows of night stars, heavens, trees with trembling crests, savage beasts, domestic animals, all the anxious souls of men, do you not hear? 'Thaïs is dying!' Disappear, ye lights, breezes, and perfumes! Hide yourselves, ye shapes and thoughts of the universe! 'Thaïs is dying!' She was the beauty of the world, and all that drew near to her grew fairer in the reflection of her grace. The old man and the sages who sat near her, at the banquet at Alexandria, how pleasant

they were, and how fascinating was their conversation! A host of brilliant thoughts sprang to their lips, and all their ideas were steeped in pleasure. And it was because the breath of Thaïs was on them that all they said was love, beauty, truth. A delightful impiety lent its grace to their discourse. They thoroughly expressed all human splendour. Alas! all that is but a dream. Thaïs is dying! Oh, how easy it will be to me to die of her death! But canst thou only die, withered embryo, fœtus steeped in gall and scalding tears? Miserable abortion, dost thou think thou canst taste death, thou who hast never known life? If only God exists, that he may damn me. I hope for it—I wish it. God, I hate Thee—dost Thou hear? Overwhelm me with Thy damnation. To compel Thee to, I spit in Thy face. I must find an eternal hell, to exhaust the eternity of rage which consumes me."

* * * * *

The next day, at dawn, Albina received the Abbot of Antinoë at the nunnery.

"Thou art welcome to our tabernacles of peace, venerable father, for no doubt, thou comest to bless the saint thou hast given us. Thou knowest that God, in his mercy, has called her to Him; how couldst thou fail to know tidings that the angels have carried from desert to desert? It is true that

Thaïs is about to meet her blessed death. Her labours are accomplished, and I ought to inform thee, in a few words, as to her conduct whilst she was still amongst us. After thy departure, when she was confined in a cell sealed with thy seal, I sent her, with her food, a flute, similar to those which girls of her profession play at banquets. I did that to prevent her from falling into a melancholy mood, and that she should not show less skill and talent before God than she had shown before men. In this I showed prudence and foresight, for all day long Thaïs praised the Lord upon the flute, and the virgins, who were attracted by the sound of this invisible flute, said, 'We hear the nightingale of the heavenly groves, the dying swan of Jesus crucified.' Thus did Thaïs perform her penance, when, after sixty days, the door which thou hadst sealed opened of itself, and the clay seal was broken without being touched by any human hand. By that sign I knew that the trial thou hadst imposed upon her was at an end, and that God had pardoned the sins of the flute-player. From that time she has shared the ordinary life of my nuns, working and praying with them. She was an example to them by the modesty of her acts and words, and seemed like a statue of purity amongst them. Sometimes she was sad; but those clouds soon passed. When I saw that she

was really drawn towards God by faith, hope, and love, I did not hesitate to employ her talent, and even her beauty, for the improvement of her sisters. I asked her to represent before us the actions of the famous women and wise virgins of the Scriptures. She acted Esther, Deborah, Judith, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. I know, venerable father, that thy austere mind is alarmed at the idea of these performances. But thou thyself wouldest have been touched if thou hadst seen her in these pious scenes, shedding real tears, and raising to heaven arms graceful as palm leaves. I have long governed a community of women, and I make it a rule never to oppose their nature. All seeds give not the same flowers. Not all souls are sanctified in the same way. It must also not be forgotten that Thaïs gave herself to God whilst she was still beautiful, and such a sacrifice is, if not unexampled, at least very rare. This beauty —her natural vesture—has not left her during the three months' fever of which she is dying. As, during her illness, she has incessantly asked to see the sky, I have her carried every morning into the courtyard, near the well, under the old fig tree, in the shade of which the abbesses of this convent are accustomed to hold their meetings. Thou wilt find her there, venerable father; but hasten, for God

calls her, and this night a shroud will cover that face which God made both to shame and to edify this world."

Paphnutius followed her into a courtyard flooded with the morning light. On the edge of the brick roofs, the pigeons formed a string of pearls. On a bed, in the shade of the fig tree, Thaïs lay quite white, her arms crossed. By her side stood veiled women, reciting the prayers for the dying.

"Have mercy, upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

He called her—

"Thaïs!"

She raised her eyelids, and turned the whites of her eyes in the direction of the voice.

Albina made a sign to the veiled women to retire a few paces.

"Thaïs!" repeated the monk.

She raised her head; a light breath came from her pale lips.

"Is it thou, my father? . . . Dost thou remember the water of the spring, and the dates that we picked? . . . That day, my father, love was born in my heart—the love of life eternal."

She was silent, and her head fell back.

Death was upon her, and the sweat of the last

agony bedewed her forehead. A pigeon broke the still silence with its plaintive cooing. Then the sobs of the monk mingled with the psalms of the virgins.

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."

Suddenly Thaïs sat up in the bed. Her violet eyes opened wide, and with a rapt gaze, her arms stretched towards the distant hills, she said in a clear, fresh voice—

"Behold them—the roses of the eternal dawn!"

Her eyes shone; a slight flush suffused her face. She had revived, more sweet and more beautiful than ever. Paphnutius knelt down, and threw his long black arms around her.

"Do not die!" he cried, in a strange voice, which he himself did not recognise. "I love thee! Do not die! Listen, my Thaïs. I have deceived thee? I was but a wretched fool. God, heaven—all that is nothing. There is nothing true but this wordly life, and the love of human beings. I love thee! Do not die! That would be impossible—thou art too precious! Come, come with me! Let us fly? I will carry thee far away in my arms. Come, let us love! Hear me, O my beloved, and say, 'I will live; I wish to live.' Thaïs, Thaïs, arise!"

She did not hear him. Her eyes gazed into infinity.

She murmured—

"Heaven opens. I see the angels, the prophets, and the saints. . . . The good Theodore is amongst them, his hands filled with flowers; he smiles on me and calls me. . . . Two angels come to me. They draw near. . . . How beautiful they are! I see God!"

She uttered a joyful sigh, and her head fell back motionless on the pillow. Thaïs was dead.

Paphnutius held her in a last despairing embrace; his eyes devoured her with desire, rage, and love.

Albina cried to him—

"Avaunt, accursed wretch!"

And she gently placed her fingers on the eyelids of the dead girl. Paphnutius staggered back, his eyes burning with flames and feeling the earth open beneath his feet.

The virgins chanted the song of Zacharias:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel."

Suddenly their voices stayed in their throat. They had seen the monk's face, and they fled in affright, crying—

"A vampire! A vampire!"

He had become so repulsive, that passing his hand over his face, he felt his own hideousness.

CRAINQUEBILLE

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TO

ALEXANDRE STEINLEN

AND TO

LUCIEN GUITRY

WHO, THE FORMER IN A SERIES OF ADMIRABLE DRAWINGS, THE LATTER IN A FINE DRAMATIC CREATION, HAVE INVESTED WITH A TRAGIC GREATNESS THE HUMBLE FIGURE OF MY POOR COSTERMONGER

NOTE

The section entitled "Riquet" forms Chapter II of "Monsieur Bergeret à Paris" and is here included as an introduction to Riquet's "Meditations."

CRAINQUEBILLE

CRAINQUEBILLE

I

N every sentence pronounced by a judge in the name of the sovereign people, dwells the whole majesty of justice. The august character of that justice was brought home to Jérôme Crainquebille, costermonger, when, accused of having insulted a policeman, he appeared in the police court. Having taken his place in the dock, he beheld in the imposing sombre hall magistrates, clerks, lawyers in their robes, the usher wearing his chains, *gendarmes,* and, behind a rail, the bare heads of the silent spectators. He, himself, occupied a raised seat, as if some sinister honour were conferred on the accused by his appearance before the magistrate. At the end of the hall, between two assessors, sat the Président Bourriche. The palm-leaves of an officer of the Academy decorated his breast. Over the tribune were a bust representing the Republic and a crucifix, as if to indicate that all laws divine and human were suspended over Crainquebille's head. Such symbols naturally in-

spired him with terror. Not being gifted with a philosophic mind, he did not inquire the meaning of the bust and the crucifix; he did not ask how far Jesus and the symbolical bust harmonized in the Law Courts. Nevertheless, here was matter for reflection; for, after all, pontifical teaching and canon law are in many points opposed to the constitution of the Republic and to the civil code. So far as we know the Decretals have not been abolished. To-day, as formerly, the Church of Christ teaches that only those powers are lawful to which it has given its sanction. Now the French Republic claims to be independent of pontifical power. Crainquebille might reasonably say:

"Gentlemen and magistrates, in so much as President Loubet has not been anointed, the Christ, whose image is suspended over your heads, repudiates you through the voice of councils and of Popes. Either he is here to remind you of the rights of the Church, which invalidate yours, or His presence has no rational signification."

Whereupon President Bourriche might reply:

"Prisoner Crainquebille, the kings of France have always quarrelled with the Pope. Guillaume de Nogaret was excommunicated, but for so trifling a reason he did not resign his office. The Christ of the tribune is not the Christ of Gregory VII or of

Boniface VIII. He is, if you will, the Christ of the Gospels, who knew not one word of canon law, and had never heard of the holy Decretals."

Then Crainquebille might not without reason have answered:

"The Christ of the Gospels was an agitator. Moreover, he was the victim of a sentence, which for nineteen hundred years all Christian peoples have regarded as a grave judicial error. I defy you Monsieur le Président, to condemn me in His name to so much as forty-eight hours' imprisonment."

But Crainquebille did not indulge in any considerations either historical, political or social. He was wrapped in amazement. All the ceremonial, with which he was surrounded, impressed him with a very lofty idea of justice. Filled with reverence, overcome with terror, he was ready to submit to his judges in the matter of his guilt. In his own conscience he was convinced of his innocence; but he felt how insignificant is the conscience of a costermonger in the face of the panoply of the law, and the ministers of public prosecution. Already his lawyer had half persuaded him that he was not innocent.

A summary and hasty examination had brought out the charges under which he laboured.

II

CRAINQUEBILLE'S MISADVENTURE

P and down the town went Jérôme Crainquebille, costermonger, pushing his barrow before him and crying: "Cabbages! Turnips! Carrots!" When he had leeks he cried: "Asparagus!" For leeks are the asparagus of the poor. Now it happened that on October 20, at noon, as he was going down the Rue Montmartre, there came out of her shop the shoemaker's wife, Madame Bayard. She went up to Crainquebille's barrow and scornfully taking up a bundle of leeks, she said:

"I don't think much of your leeks. What do you want a bundle?"

"Sevenpence halfpenny, mum, and the best in the market!"

"Sevenpence halfpenny for three wretched leeks?"

And disdainfully she cast the leeks back into the barrow.

Then it was that Constable 64 came and said to Crainquebille:

"Move on."

Moving on was what Crainquebille had been doing from morning till evening for fifty years. Such an order seemed right to him, and perfectly in accordance with the nature of things. Quite prepared to obey, he urged his customer to take what she wanted.

"You must give me time to choose," she retorted sharply.

Then she felt all the bundles of leeks over again. Finally, she selected the one she thought the best, and held it clasped to her bosom as saints in church pictures hold the palm of victory.

"I will give you sevenpence. That's quite enough; and I'll have to fetch it from the shop, for I haven't anything on me."

Still embracing the leeks, she went back into the shop, whither she had been preceded by a customer, carrying a child.

Just at this moment Constable 64 said to Crainquebille for the second time:

"Move on."

"I'm waiting for my money," replied Crainquebille.

"And I'm not telling you to wait for your money; I'm telling you to move on," retorted the constable grimly.

Meanwhile, the shoemaker's wife in her shop was fitting blue slippers on to a child of eighteen months, whose mother was in a hurry. And the green heads of the leeks were lying on the counter.

For the half century that he had been pushing his barrow through the streets, Crainquebille had been learning respect for authority. But now his position was a peculiar one: he was torn asunder between what was his due and what was his duty. His was not a judicial mind. He failed to understand that the possession of an individual's right in no way exonerated him from the performance of a social duty. He attached too great importance to his claim to receive sevenpence, and too little to the duty of pushing his barrow and moving on, for ever moving on. He stood still.

For the third time Constable 64 quietly and calmly ordered him to move on. Unlike Inspector Montauciel, whose habit it is to threaten constantly but never to take proceedings, Constable 64 is slow to threaten and quick to act. Such is his character. Though somewhat sly he is an excellent servant and a loyal soldier. He is as brave as a lion and as gentle as a child. He knows naught save his official instructions.

"Don't you understand when I tell you to move on?"

To Crainquebille's mind his reason for standing still was too weighty for him not to consider it sufficient. Wherefore, artlessly and simply he explained it:

"Good Lord! Don't I tell you that I am waiting for my money."

Constable 64 merely replied:

"Do you want me to summons you? If you do you have only to say so."

At these words Crainquebille slowly shrugged his shoulders, looked sadly at the constable, and then raised his eyes to heaven, as if he would say:

"I call God to witness! Am I a law-breaker? Am I one to make light of the by-laws and ordinances which regulate my ambulatory calling? At five o'clock in the morning I was at the market. Since seven, pushing my barrow and wearing my hands to the bone, I have been crying: 'Cabbages! Turnips! Carrots!' I am turned sixty. I am worn out. And you ask me whether I have raised the black flag of rebellion. You are mocking me and your joking is cruel."

Either because he failed to notice the expression on Crainquebille's face, or because he considered it no excuse for disobedience, the constable inquired curtly and roughly whether he had been understood.

Now, just at that moment the block of traffic in the Rue Montmartre was at its worst. Carriages, drays, carts, omnibuses, trucks, jammed one against the other, seemed indissolubly welded together. From their quivering immobility proceeded shouts and oaths. Cabmen and butchers' boys grandiloquent and drawling insulted one another from a distance, and omnibus conductors, regarding Crainquebille as the cause of the block, called him "a dirty leek."

Meanwhile, on the pavement the curious were crowding round to listen to the dispute. Then the constable, finding himself the centre of attention, began to think it time to display his authority:

"Very well," he said, taking a stumpy pencil and a greasy notebook from his pocket.

Crainquebille persisted in his idea, obedient to a force within. Besides, it was now impossible for him either to move on or to draw back. The wheel of his barrow was unfortunately caught in that of a milkman's cart.

Tearing his hair beneath his cap he cried:

"But don't I tell you I'm waiting for my money! Here's a fix! *Misère de misère! Bon sang de bon sang!*"

By these words, expressive rather of despair than of rebellion, Constable 64 considered he had been

insulted. And, because to his mind all insults must necessarily take the consecrated, regular, traditional, liturgical, ritual form so to speak of *Mort aux vaches,** thus the offender's words were heard and understood by the constable.

"Ah! You said: *Mort aux vaches.* Very good. Come along."

Stupefied with amazement and distress, Crainquebille opened his great rheumy eyes and gazed at Constable 64. With a broken voice proceeding now from the top of his head and now from the heels of his boots, he cried, with his arms folded over his blue blouse:

"I said *'Mort aux vaches'?* I? . . . Oh!"

The tradesmen and errand boys hailed the arrest with laughter. It gratified the taste of all crowds for violent and ignoble spectacles. But there was one serious person who was pushing his way through the throng; he was a sad-looking old man, dressed in black, wearing a high hat; he went up to the constable and said to him in a low voice very gently and firmly:

"You are mistaken. This man did not insult you."

"Mind your own business," replied the police-

*It is impossible to translate this expression. As explained on p. 19, it means "down with spies," the word spies being used to indicate the police.

man, but without threatening, for he was speaking to a man who was well dressed.

The old man insisted calmly and tenaciously. And the policeman ordered him to make his declaration to the Police Commissioner.

Meanwhile Crainquebille was explaining:

"Then I did say *'Mort aux vaches!'* Oh! . . ."

As he was thus giving vent to his astonishment, Madame Bayard, the shoemaker's wife, came to him with sevenpence in her hand. But Constable 64 already had him by the collar; so Madame Bayard, thinking that no debt could be due to a man who was being taken to the police-station, put her sevenpence into her apron pocket.

Then, suddenly beholding his barrow confiscated, his liberty lost, a gulf opening beneath him and the sky overcast, Crainquebille murmured:

"It can't be helped!"

Before the Commissioner, the old gentleman declared that he had been hindered on his way by the block in the traffic, and so had witnessed the incident. He maintained that the policeman had not been insulted, and that he was labouring under a delusion. He gave his name and profession: Dr. David Matthieu, chief physician at the Ambroise-Paré Hospital, officer of the Legion of Honour. At another time such evidence would have been

sufficient for the Commissioner. But just then men of science were regarded with suspicion in France.

Crainquebille continued under arrest. He passed the night in the lock-up. In the morning he was taken to the Police Court in the prison van.

He did not find prison either sad or humiliating. It seemed to him necessary. What struck him as he entered was the cleanliness of the walls and of the brick floor.

"Well, for a clean place, yes, it is a clean place. You might eat off the floor."

When he was left alone, he wanted to draw out his stool; but he perceived that it was fastened to the wall. He expressed his surprise aloud:

"That's a queer idea! Now there's a thing I should never have thought of, I'm sure."

Having sat down, he twiddled his thumbs and remained wrapped in amazement. The silence and the solitude overwhelmed him. The time seemed long. Anxiously he thought of his barrow, which had been confiscated with its load of cabbages, carrots, celery, dandelion and corn-salad. And he wondered, asking himself with alarm: "What have they done with my barrow?"

On the third day he received a visit from his lawyer, Maître Lemerle, one of the youngest mem-

bers of the Paris Bar, President of a section of La Ligue de la Patrie Française.

Crainquebille endeavoured to tell him his story; but it was not easy, for he was not accustomed to conversation. With a little help he might perhaps have succeeded. But his lawyer shook his head doubtfully at everything he said; and, turning over his papers, muttered:

"Hm! Hm! I don't find anything about all this in my brief."

Then, in a bored tone, twirling his fair moustache he said:

"In your own interest it would be advisable, perhaps, for you to confess. Your persistence in absolute denial seems to me extremely unwise."

And from that moment Crainquebille would have made confession if he had known what to confess.

III

CRAINQUEBILLE BEFORE THE MAGISTRATES

RESIDENT BOURRICHE devoted six whole minutes to the examination of Crainquebille. This examination would have been more enlightening if the accused had replied to the questions asked him. But Crainquebille was unaccustomed to discussion; and in such a company his lips were sealed by reverence and fear. So he was silent: and the President answered his own question; his replies were staggering. He concluded: "Finally, you admit having said, *'Mort aux vaches.'* "

"I said, *'Mort aux vaches!'* because the policeman said, *'Mort aux vaches!'* so then I said *'Mort aux vaches!'* "

He meant that, being overwhelmed by the most unexpected of accusations, he had in his amazement merely repeated the curious words falsely attributed to him, and which he had certainly never pronounced. He had said, *"Mort aux vaches!"* as he

might have said, "I capable of insulting any one! how could you believe it?"

President Bourriche put a different interpretation on the incident.

"Do you maintain," he said, "that the policeman was, himself, the first to utter the exclamation?"

Crainquebille gave up trying to explain. It was too difficult.

"You do not persist in your statement. You are quite right," said the President.

And he had the witness called.

Constable 64, by name Bastien Matra, swore he spoke the truth and nothing but the truth. Then he gave evidence in the following terms:

"I was on my beat on October 20, at noon, when I noticed in the Rue Montmartre a person who appeared to be a hawker, unduly blocking the traffic with his barrow opposite No. 328. Three times I intimated to him the order to move on, but he refused to comply. And when I gave him warning that I was about to charge him, he retorted by crying: *'Mort aux vaches!'* Which I took as an insult."

This evidence, delivered in a firm and moderate manner, the magistrates received with obvious approbation. The witnesses for the defence were Madame Bayard, shoemaker's wife, and Dr. David

Matthieu, chief physician to the Hospital Ambroise Paré, officer of the Legion of Honour. Madame Bayard had seen nothing and heard nothing. Dr. Matthieu was in the crowd which had gathered round the policeman, who was ordering the costermonger to move on. His evidence led to a new episode in the trial.

"I witnessed the incident," he said, "I observed that the constable had made a mistake; he had not been insulted. I went up to him and called his attention to the fact. The officer insisted on arresting the costermonger, and told me to follow him to the Commissioner of Police. This I did. Before the Commissioner, I repeated my declaration."

"You may sit down," said the President. "Usher, recall witness Matra."

"Matra, when you proceeded to arrest the accused, did not Dr. Matthieu point out to you that you were mistaken?"

"That is to say, Monsieur le Président, that he insulted me."

"What did he say?"

"He said, *'Mort aux vaches!'* "

Uproarious laughter arose from the audience.

"You may withdraw," said the President hurriedly.

And he warned the public that if such unseemly demonstrations occurred again he would clear the court. Meanwhile, Counsel for the defence was haughtily fluttering the sleeves of his gown, and for the moment it was thought that Crainquebille would be acquitted.

Order having been restored, Maître Lemerle rose. He opened his pleading with a eulogy of policemen: "those unassuming servants of society who, in return for a trifling salary, endure fatigue and brave incessant danger with daily heroism. They were soldiers once, and soldiers they remain; soldiers, that word expresses everything. . . ."

From this consideration Maître Lemerle went on to descant eloquently on the military virtues. He was one of those, he said, who would not allow a finger to be laid on the army, on that national army, to which he was so proud to belong.

The President bowed. Maître Lemerle happened to be lieutenant in the Reserves. He was also nationalist candidate for Les Vieilles Haudriettes. He continued:

"No, indeed, I do not esteem lightly the invaluable services unassumingly rendered, which the valiant people of Paris receive daily from the guardians of the peace. And had I beheld in Crainquebille, gentlemen, one who had insulted an ex-

soldier, I should never have consented to represent him before you. My client is accused of having said: *'Mort aux vaches!'* The meaning of such an expression is clear. If you consult *Le Dictionnaire de la Langue Verte* (slang) you will find: *'Vachard* a sluggard, an idler, one who stretches himself out lazily like a cow instead of working. *Vache,* one who sells himself to the police; spy.' *Mort aux vaches* is an expression employed by certain people. But the question resolves itself into this: how did Crainquebille say it? And, further, did he say it at all? Permit me to doubt it, gentlemen.

"I do not suspect Constable Matra of any evil intention. But, as we have said, his calling is arduous. He is sometimes harassed, fatigued, overdone. In such conditions he may have suffered from an aural hallucination. And, when he comes and tells you, gentlemen, that Dr. David Matthieu, officer of the Legion of Honour, chief physician at the Ambroise-Paré Hospital, a gentleman and a prince of science, cried: *'Mort aux vaches,'* then we are forced to believe that Matra is obsessed, and if the term be not too strong, suffering from the mania of persecution.

"And even if Crainquebille did cry: *'Mort aux vaches,'* it remains to be proved whether such words

on his lips can be regarded as an offence. Crainquebille is the natural child of a costermonger, depraved by years of drinking and other evil courses. Crainquebille was born alcoholic. You behold him brutalized by sixty years of poverty. Gentlemen you must conclude that he is irresponsible."

Maître Lemerle sat down. Then President Bourriche muttered a sentence condemning Jérôme Crainquebille to pay fifty francs fine and to go to prison for a fortnight. The magistrates convicted him on the strength of the evidence given by Constable Matra.

As he was being taken down the long dark passage of the Palais, Crainquebille felt an intense desire for sympathy. He turned to the municipal guard who was his escort and called him three times:

"'Cipal! . . . 'cipal! . . . Eh! 'cipal!" And he sighed:

"If anyone had told me only a fortnight ago that this would happen!"

Then he reflected:

"They speak too quickly, these gentlemen. They speak well, but they speak too quickly. You can't make them understand you. . . . 'cipal, don't you think they speak too quickly?"

But the soldier marched straight on without replying or turning his head.

Crainquebille asked him:

"Why don't you answer me?"

The soldier was silent. And Crainquebille said bitterly:

"You would speak to a dog. Why not to me? Do you never open your mouth? Is it because your breath is foul?"

IV

AN APOLOGY FOR PRESIDENT BOURRICHE

FTER the sentence had been pronounced, several members of the audience and two or three lawyers left the hall. The clerk was already calling another case. Those who went out did not reflect on the Crainquebille affair, which had not greatly interested them; and they thought no more about it. Monsieur Jean Lermite, an etcher, who happened to be at the Palais, was the only one who meditated on what he had just seen and heard. Putting his arm on the shoulder of Maître Joseph Aubarrée, he said:

"President Bourriche must be congratulated on having kept his mind free from idle curiosity, and from the intellectual pride which is determined to know everything. If he had weighed one against the other the contradictory evidence of Constable Matra and Dr. David Matthieu, the magistrate would have adopted a course leading to nothing but doubt and uncertainty. The method of exam-

ining facts in a critical spirit would be fatal to the administration of justice. If the judge were so imprudent as to follow that method, his sentences would depend on his personal sagacity, of which he has generally no very great store, and on human infirmity which is universal. Where can he find a criterion? It cannot be denied that the historical method is absolutely incapable of providing him with the certainty he needs. In this connexion you may recall a story told of Sir Walter Raleigh.

" 'One day, when Raleigh, a prisoner in the Tower of London, was working, as was his wont, at the second part of his "History of the World," there was a scuffle under his window. He went and looked at the brawlers; and when he returned to his work, he thought he had observed them very carefully. But on the morrow, having related the incident to one of his friends who had witnessed the affair and had even taken part in it, he was contradicted by his friend on every point. Reflecting, therefore, that if he were mistaken as to events which passed beneath his very eyes, how much greater must be the difficulty of ascertaining the truth concerning events far distant, he threw the manuscript of his history into the fire.'

"If the judges had the same scruples as Sir Walter Raleigh, they would throw all their notes

into the fire. But they have no right to do so. They would thus be flouting justice; they would be committing a crime. We may despair of knowing, we must not despair of judging. Those who demand that sentences pronounced in Law Courts should be founded upon a methodical examination of facts, are dangerous sophists, and perfidious enemies of justice both civil and military. President Bourriche has too judicial a mind to permit his sentences to depend on reason and knowledge, the conclusions of which are eternally open to question. He founds them on dogma and moulds them by tradition, so that the authority of his sentences is equal to that of the Church's commandments. His sentences are indeed canonical. I mean that he derives them from a certain number of sacred canons. See, for example, how he classifies evidence, not according to the uncertain and deceptive qualities of appearances and of human veracity, but according to intrinsic, permanent and manifest qualities. He weighs them in the scale, using weapons of war for weights. Can anything be at once simpler and wiser? Irrefutable for him is the evidence of a guardian of the peace, once his humanity be abstracted, and he conceived as a registered number, and according to the categories of an ideal police. Not that Matrā (Bastien), born at Cinto-

Monte in Corsica, appears to him incapable of error. He never thought that Bastien Matra was gifted with any great faculty of observation, nor that he applied any secret and vigorous method to the examination of facts. In truth it is not Bastien Matra he is considering, but Constable 64. A man is fallible, he thinks. Peter and Paul may be mistaken. Descartes and Gassendi, Leibnitz and Newton, Bichat and Claude Bernard were capable of error. We may all err and at any moment. The causes of error are innumerable. The perceptions of our senses and the judgment of our minds are sources of illusion and causes of uncertainty. We dare not rely on the evidence of a single man: *Testis unus, testis nullus.* But we may have faith in a number. Bastien Matra, of Cinto-Monte, is fallible. But Constable 64, when abstraction has been made of his humanity, cannot err. He is an entity. An entity has nothing in common with a man, it is free from all that confuses, corrupts and deceives men. It is pure, unchangeable and unalloyed. Wherefore the magistrates did not hesitate to reject the evidence of the mere man, Dr. David Matthieu, and to admit that of Constable 64, who is the pure idea, an emanation from divinity come down to the judgment bar.

"By following such a line of argument, President

Bourriche attains to a kind of infallibility, the only kind to which a magistrate may aspire. When the man who bears witness is armed with a sword, it is the sword's evidence that must be listened to, not the man's. The man is contemptible and may be wrong. The sword is not contemptible and is always right. President Bourriche has seen deeply into the spirit of laws. Society rests on force; force must be respected as the august foundation of society. Justice is the administration of force. President Bourriche knows that Constable 64 is an integral part of the Government. The Government is immanent in each one of its officers. To slight the authority of Constable 64 is to weaken the State. To eat the leaves of an artichoke is to eat the artichoke, as Bossuet puts it in his sublime language. (*Politique tirée de l'Ecriture sainte, passim.*)

"All the swords of the State are turned in the same direction. To oppose one to the other is to overthrow the Republic. For that reason, Crainquebille, the accused, is justly condemned to a fortnight in prison and a fine of fifty francs, on the evidence of Constable 64. I seem to hear President Bourriche, himself, explaining the high and noble consideration which inspired his sentence. I seem to hear him saying:

" 'I judged this person according to the evidence of Constable 64, because Constable 64 is the emanation of public force. And if you wish to prove my wisdom, imagine the consequences had I adopted the opposite course. You will see at once that it would have been absurd. For if my judgments were in opposition to force, they would never be executed. Notice, gentlemen, that judges are only obeyed when force is on their side. A judge without policemen would be but an idle dreamer. I should be doing myself an injury if I admitted a policeman to be in the wrong. Moreover, the very spirit of laws is in opposition to my doing so. To disarm the strong and to arm the weak would be to subvert that social order which it is my duty to preserve. Justice is the sanction of established injustice. Was justice ever seen to oppose conquerors and usurpers? When an unlawful power arises, justice has only to recognize it and it becomes lawful. Form is everything; and between crime and innocence there is but the thickness of a piece of stamped paper. It was for you, Crainquebille, to be the strongest. If, after having cried: *"Mort aux vaches!"* you had declared yourself emperor, dictator, President of the Republic or even town councillor, I assure you you would not have been sentenced to pass a fortnight in

prison, and to pay a fine of fifty francs. I should have acquitted you. You may be sure of that.'

"Such would have doubtless been the words of President Bourriche; for he has a judicial mind, and he knows what a magistrate owes to society. With order and regularity he defends social principles. Justice is social. Only wrong-headed persons would make justice out to be human and reasonable. Justice is administered upon fixed rules, not in obedience to physical emotions and flashes of intelligence. Above all things do not ask justice to be just, it has no need to be just since it is justice, and I might even say that the idea of just justice can have only arisen in the brains of an anarchist. True, President Magnaud pronounces just sentences; but if they are reversed, that is still justice.

"The true judge weighs his evidence with weights that are weapons. So it was in the Crainquebille affair, and in other more famous cases."

Thus said Monsieur Jean Lermite as he paced up and down the Salle des Pas Perdus.

Scratching the tip of his nose, Maître Joseph Aubarrée, who knows the Palais well, replied:

"If you want to hear what I think, I don't believe that President Bourriche rose to so lofty a metaphysical plane. In my opinion, when he received as true the evidence of Constable 64, he

merely acted according to precedent. Imitation lies at the root of most human actions. A respectable person is one who conforms to custom. People are called good when they do as others do."

V

CRAINQUEBILLE SUBMITS TO THE LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC

AVING been taken back to his prison, Crainquebille sat down on his chained stool, filled with astonishment and admiration. He, himself, was not quite sure whether the magistrates were mistaken. The tribunal had concealed its essential weakness beneath the majesty of form. He could not believe that he was in the right, as against magistrates whose reasons he had not understood: it was impossible for him to conceive that anything could go wrong in so elaborate a ceremony. For, unaccustomed to attending Mass or frequenting the Elysée, he had never in his life witnessed anything so grand as a police court trial. He was perfectly aware that he had never cried *"Mort aux vaches!"* That for having said it he should have been sentenced to a fortnight's imprisonment seemed to him an august mystery, one of those articles of faith to which believers adhere without understanding them, an obscure, striking, adorable and terrible revelation.

This poor old man believed himself guilty of having mystically offended Constable 64, just as the little boy learning his first Catechism believes himself guilty of Eve's sin. His sentence had taught him that he had cried: *"Mort aux vaches!"* He must, therefore have cried *"Mort aux vaches!"* in some mysterious manner, unknown to himself. He was transported into a supernatural world. His trial was his apocalypse.

If he had no very clear idea of the offence, his idea of the penalty was still less clear. His sentence appeared to him a solemn and superior ritual, something dazzling and incomprehensible, which is not to be discussed, and for which one is neither to be praised nor pitied. If at that moment he had seen President Bourriche, with white wings and a halo round his forehead, coming down through a hole in the ceiling, he would not have been surprised at this new manifestation of judicial glory. He would have said: "This is my trial continuing!"

On the next day his lawyer visited him:

"Well, my good fellow, things aren't so bad after all! Don't be discouraged. A fortnight is soon over. We have not much to complain of."

"As for that, I must say the gentlemen were very kind, very polite: not a single rude word. I

shouldn't have believed it. And the *cipal* was wearing white gloves. Did you notice?"

"Everything considered, we did well to confess."

"Perhaps."

"Crainquebille, I have a piece of good news for you. A charitable person, whose interest I have elicited on your behalf, gave me fifty francs for you. The sum will be used to pay your fine."

"When will you give me the money?"

"It will be paid into the clerk's office. You need not trouble about it."

"It does not matter. All the same I am very grateful to this person." And Crainquebille murmured meditatively: "It's something out of the common that's happening to me."

"Don't exaggerate, Crainquebille. Your case is by no means rare, far from it."

"You couldn't tell me where they've put my barrow?"

VI

CRAINQUEBILLE IN THE LIGHT OF PUBLIC OPINION

FTER his discharge from prison, Crainquebille trundled his barrow along the Rue Montmartre, crying: "Cabbages, turnips, carrots!" He was neither ashamed nor proud of his adventure. The memory of it was not painful. He classed it in his mind with dreams, travels and plays. But, above all things, he was glad to be walking in the mud, along the paved streets, and to see overhead the rainy sky as dirty as the gutter, the dear sky of the town. At every corner he stopped to have a drink; then, gay and unconstrained, spitting in his hands in order to moisten his horny palms, he would seize the shafts and push on his barrow. Meanwhile a flight of sparrows, as poor and as early as he, seeking their livelihood in the road, flew off at the sound of his familiar cry: "Cabbages, turnips, carrots!" An old house wife, who had come up, said to him as she felt his celery:

"What's happened to you, Père Crainquebille?

We haven't seen ycu for three weeks. Have you been ill? You look rather pale."

"I'll tell you, M'ame Mailloche, I've been doing the gentleman."

Nothing in his life changed, except that he went oftener to the pub, because he had an idea it was a holiday and that he had made the acquaintance of charitable folk. He returned to his garret rather gay. Stretched on his mattress he drew over him the sacks borrowed from the chestnut-seller at the corner which served him as blankets and he pondered: "Well, prison is not so bad; one has everything one wants there. But all the same one is better at home."

His contentment did not last long. He soon perceived that his customers looked at him askance.

"Fine celery, M'ame Cointreau!"

"I don't want anything."

"What! nothing! do you live on air then?"

And M'ame Cointreau without deigning to reply returned to the large bakery of which she was the mistress. The shopkeepers and caretakers, who had once flocked round his barrow all green and blooming, now turned away from him. Having reached the shoemaker's, at the sign of l'Ange Gardien, the place where his adventures with justice had begun, he called:

"M'ame Bayard, M'ame Bayard, you owe me sevenpence halfpenny from last time."

But M'ame Bayard, who was sitting at her counter, did not deign to turn her head.

The whole of the Rue Montmartre was aware that Père Crainquebille had been in prison, and the whole of the Rue Montmartre gave up his acquaintance. The rumour of his conviction had reached the Faubourg and the noisy corner of the Rue Richer. There, about noon, he perceived Madame Laure, a kind and faithful customer, leaning over the barrow of another costermonger, young Martin. She was feeling a large cabbage. Her hair shone in the sunlight like masses of golden threads loosely twisted. And young Martin, a nobody, a good-for-nothing, was protesting with his hand on his heart that there were no finer vegetables than his. At this sight Crainquebille's heart was rent. He pushed his barrow up to young Martin's, and in a plaintive broken voice said to Madame Laure: "It's not fair of you to forsake me."

As Madame Laure herself admitted, she was no duchess. It was not in society that she had acquired her ideas of the prison van and the police-station. But can one not be honest in every station in life? Every one has his self-respect; and one does not like to deal with a man who has just

come out of prison. So the only notice she took of Crainquebille was to give him a look of disgust. And the old costermonger resenting the affront shouted:

"Dirty wench, go along with you."

Madame Laure let fall her cabbage and cried:

"Eh! Be off with you, you bad penny. You come out of prison and then insult folk!"

If Crainquebille had had any self-control he would never have reproached Madame Laure with her calling. He knew only too well that one is not master of one's fate, that one cannot always choose one's occupation, and that good people may be found everywhere. He was accustomed discreetly to ignore her customers' business with her; and he despised no one. But he was beside himself. Three times he called Madame Laure drunkard, wench, harridan. A group of idlers gathered round Madame Laure and Crainquebille. They exchanged a few more insults as serious as the first; and they would soon have exhausted their vocabulary, if a policeman had not suddenly appeared, and at once, by his silence and immobility, rendered them as silent and as motionless as himself. They separated. But this scene put the finishing touch to the discrediting of Crainquebille in the eyes of the Faubourg Montmartre and the Rue Richer.

VII

RESULTS

HE old man went along mumbling: "For certain she's a hussy, and none more of a hussy than she."

But at the bottom of his heart that was not the reproach he brought against her. He did not scorn her for being what she was. Rather he esteemed her for it, knowing her to be frugal and orderly. Once they had liked to talk together. She used to tell him of her parents who lived in the country. And they had both resolved to have a little garden and keep poultry. She was a good customer. And then to see her buying cabbages from young Martin, a dirty, good-for-nothing wretch; it cut him to the heart; and when she pretended to despise him, that put his back up, and then . . . !

But she, alas! was not the only one who shunned him as if he had the plague. Every one avoided him. Just like Madame Laure, Madame Cointreau the baker, Madame Bayard of l'Ange Gardien scorned and repulsed him. Why! the whole of society refused to have anything to do with him.

So because one had been put away for a fortnight one was not good enough even to sell leeks! Was it just? Was it reasonable to make a decent chap die of starvation because he had got into difficulties with a copper? If he was not to be allowed to sell vegetables then it was all over with him. Like a badly doctored wine he turned sour. After having had words with Madame Laure he now had them with every one. For a mere nothing he would tell his customers what he thought of them and in no ambiguous terms, I assure you. If they felt his wares too long he would call them to their faces chatterer, soft head. Likewise at the wine-shop he bawled at his comrades. His friend, the chestnut-seller, no longer recognized him; old Père Crainquebille, he said, had turned into a regular porcupine. It cannot be denied: he was becoming rude, disagreeable, evil-mouthed, loquacious. The truth of the matter was that he was discovering the imperfections of society; but he had not the facilities of a Professor of Moral and Political Science for the expression of his ideas concerning the vices of the system and the reforms necessary; and his thoughts evolved devoid of order and moderation.

Misfortune was rendering him unjust. He was taking his revenge on those who did not wish him ill and sometimes on those who were weaker than

he. One day he boxed Alphonse, the wine-seller's little boy, on the ear, because he had asked him what it was like to be sent away. Crainquebille struck him and said:

"Dirty brat! it's your father who ought to be sent away instead of growing rich by selling poison."

A deed and a speech which did him no honour; for, as the chestnut-seller justly remarked, one ought not to strike a child, neither should one reproach him with a father whom he has not chosen.

Crainquebille began to drink. The less money he earned the more brandy he drank. Formerly frugal and sober he himself marvelled at the change.

"I never used to be a waster," he said. "I suppose one doesn't improve as one grows old."

Sometimes he severely blamed himself for his misconduct and his laziness:

"Crainquebille, old chap, you ain't good for anything but liftin' your glass."

Sometimes he deceived himself and made out that he needed the drink.

"I must have it now and then; I must have a drop to strengthen me and cheer me up. It seems as if I had a fire in my inside; and there's nothing like the drink for quenching it."

It often happened that he missed the auction in the morning and so had to provide himself with damaged fruit and vegetables on credit. One day, feeling tired and discouraged, he left his barrow in its shed, and spent the livelong day hanging round the stall of Madame Rose, the tripe-seller, or lounging in and out of the wine-shops near the market. In the evening sitting on a basket, he meditated and became conscious of his deterioration. He recalled the strength of his early years: the achievements of former days, the arduous labours and the glad evenings: those days quickly passing, all alike and fully occupied; the pacing in the darkness up and down the Market pavement, waiting for the early auction; the vegetables carried armfuls and artistically arranged in the barrow; the piping hot black coffee of Mère Théodore swallowed standing, and at one gulp; the shafts grasped vigorously; and then the loud cry, piercing as cock crow, rending the morning air as he passed through the crowded streets. All that innocent, rough life of the human pack-horse came before him. For half a century, on his travelling stall, he had borne to townsfolk worn with care and vigil the fresh harvest of kitchen gardens. Shaking his head he sighed:

"No! I'm not what I was. I'm done for.

The pitcher goes so often to the well that at last it comes home broken. And then I've never been the same since my affair with the magistrates. No, I'm not the man I was."

In short he was demoralized. And when a man reaches that condition he might as well be on the ground and unable to rise. All the passers-by tread him under foot.

VIII

THE FINAL RESULT

OVERTY came, black poverty. The old costermonger who used to come back from the Faubourg Montmartre with a bag full of five-franc pieces, had not a single coin now. Winter came. Driven out of his garret, he slept under the carts in a shed. It had been raining for days; the gutters were overflowing, and the shed was flooded.

Crouching in his barrow, over the pestilent water, in the company of spiders, rats and half-starved cats, he was meditating in the gloom. Having eaten nothing all day and no longer having the chestnut-seller's sacks for a covering, he recalled the fortnight when the Government had provided him with food and clothing. He envied the prisoner's fate. They suffer neither cold nor hunger, and an idea occurred to him:

"Since I know the trick why don't I use it?"

He rose and went out into the street. It was a little past eleven. The night was dark and chill.

A drizzling mist was falling colder, and more penetrating than rain. The few passers-by crept along under the cover of the houses.

Crainquebille went past the Church of Saint-Eustache and turned into the Rue Montmartre. It was deserted. A guardian of the peace stood on the pavement, by the apse of the church. He was under a gas-lamp, and all around fell a fine rain looking reddish in the gaslight. It fell on to the policeman's hood. He looked chilled to the bone; but, either because he preferred to be in the light or because he was tired of walking he stayed under the lamp, and perhaps it seemed to him a friend, a companion. In the loneliness of the night the flickering flame was his only entertainment. In his immobility he appeared hardly human. The reflection of his boots on the wet pavement, which looked like a lake, prolonged him downwards and gave him from a distance the air of some amphibious monster half out of water. Observed more closely he had at once a monkish and a military appearance. The coarse features of his countenance, magnified under the shadow of his hood, were sad and placid. He wore a thick moustache, short and grey. He was an old copper, a man of some two-score years. Crainquebille went up to him softly, and in a weak hesitating voice, said: *"Mort aux vaches!"*

Then he waited the result of those sacred words. But nothing came of them. The constable remained motionless and silent, with his arms folded under his short cloak. His eyes were wide open; they glistened in the darkness and regarded Crainquebille with sadness, vigilance and scorn.

Crainquebille, astonished, but still resolute, muttered:

"*Mort aux vaches!* I tell you."

There was a long silence in the chill darkness and the falling of the fine penetrating rain. At last the constable spoke:

"Such things are not said. . . . For sure and for certain they are not said. At your age you ought to know better. Pass on."

"Why don't you arrest me?" asked Crainquebille.

The constable shook his head beneath his dripping hood:

"If we were to take up all the addle-pates who say what they oughn't to, we should have our work cut out! . . . And what would be the use of it?"

Overcome by such magnanimous disdain, Crainquebille remained for some time stolid and silent, with his feet in the gutter. Before going, he tried to explain:

"I didn't mean to say: *Mort aux vaches!* to you.

It was no more for you than for another. It was only an idea."

The constable replied sternly but kindly:

"Whether an idea or anything else it ought not to be said, because when a man does his duty and endures much, he ought not to be insulted with idle words. . . . I tell you again to pass on."

Crainquebille, with head bent and arms hanging limp plunged into the rain and the darkness.

PUTOIS

TO GEORGES BRANDÈS

PUTOIS

I

"WHEN we were children, our tiny garden, which you could go from end to end of in twenty strides, seemed to us a vast universe, made up of joys and terrors," said Monsieur Bergeret.

"Do you remember Putois, Lucien?" asked Zoé, smiling as was her wont, with lips compressed and her nose over her needlework.

"Do I remember Putois! . . . Why, of all the figures which pass before my childhood's eyes, that of Putois remains the clearest in my memory. Not a single feature of his face or his character have I forgotten. He had a long head. . . ."

"A low forehead," added Mademoiselle Zoé.

Then antiphonally, in a monotonous voice, with mock gravity, the brother and sister recited the following points of a kind of police description:

"A low fore-head."

"Wall-eyed."

"Furtive looking."

"A crow's foot on his temple."

"High cheek-bones, red and shiny."

"His ears were ragged."

"His face was blank and expressionless."

"It was only by his hands, which were constantly moving, that you divined his thoughts."

"Thin, rather bent, weak in appearance."

"In reality of unusual strength."

"He could easily bend a five-franc piece between his thumb and forefinger."

"His thumb was huge."

"He spoke with a drawl."

"His tone was unctuous."

Suddenly Monsieur Bergeret cried eagerly:

"Zoé! We have forgotten his yellow hair and his scant beard. We must begin again."

Pauline had been listening with astonishment to this strange recital. She asked her father and her aunt how they had come to learn this prose passage by heart, and why they recited it like a Litany.

Monsieur Bergeret replied gravely:

"Pauline, what you have just heard is the sacred text, I may say the liturgy of the Bergeret family. It is right that it should be transmitted to you in order that it may not perish with your aunt and me. Your grandfather, my child, your grandfather, Eloi Bergeret, who was not one to be amused with trifles,

set a high value on this passage, principally on account of its origin. He entitled it 'The Anatomy of Putois.' And he was accustomed to say that in certain respects he set the anatomy of Putois above the anatomy of Quaresmeprenant. 'If the description written by Xenomanes,' he said, 'is more learned and richer in rare and precious terms, the description of Plutois greatly excels it in the lucidity of its ideas and the clearness of its style.' Such was his opinion, for in those days Doctor Ledouble, of Tours, had not yet expounded chapters thirty, thirty-one and thirty-two of the fourth book of Rabelais."

"I can't understand you," said Pauline.

"It is because you don't know Putois, my daughter. You must learn that, in the childhood of your father and your Aunt Zoé, there was no more familiar figure than Putois. In the home of your grandfather Bergeret, Putois was a household word. We all, in turn, believed that we had seen him."

"But who was Putois?" asked Pauline.

Instead of replying her father began to laugh, and Mademoiselle Bergeret also laughed, though her lips were closed.

Pauline looked first at one and then at the other. It seemed to her odd that her aunt should laugh so heartily, and odder still that she should laugh at the

same thing as her brother; for strange to say the minds of the brother and sister moved in different grooves.

"Tell me who Putois was, papa. Since you want me to know, tell me."

"Putois, my child, was a gardener. The son of honest farmers of Artois, he had set up as a nurseryman at Saint-Omer. But he was unable to please his customers and failed in business. He gave up his nursery and went out to work by the day. His employers were not always satisfied."

At these words, Mademoiselle Bergeret, still laughing, remarked:

"You remember, Lucien, when father couldn't find his ink-pot, his pens, his sealing-wax or his scissors on his desk, how he used to say: 'I think Putois must have been here.' "

"Ah!" said Monsieur Bergeret, "Putois had not a good reputation."

"Is that all?" asked Pauline.

"No, my child, it is not all. There was something odd about Putois; we knew him, he was familiar to us and yet . . ."

. . . . "He did not exist," said Zoé.

Monsieur Bergeret looked reproachfully at her.

"What a thing to say, Zoé! Why thus break the

charm? Putois did not exist! Dare you say so, Zoé? Can you maintain it? Before affirming that Putois did not exist, that Putois never was, you should consider the condition of being and the modes of existence. Putois existed, sister. But it is true that his was a peculiar existence."

"I understand less and less," said Pauline, growing discouraged.

"The truth will dawn upon you directly, child. Know that Putois was born in the fullness of age. I was still a child; your aunt was a little girl. We lived in a small house, in a suburb of Saint-Omer. Our parents led a quiet retired life, until they were discovered by an old lady of Saint-Omer, Madame Cornouiller, who lived in her manor of Monplaisir, some twelve miles from the town, and who turned out to be my mother's great aunt. She took advantage of the privilege of friendship, to insist on our father and mother coming to dine with her at Monplaisir every Sunday. There they were bored to death. But the old lady said it was right for relatives to dine together on Sundays, and that only ill-bred persons neglected the observance of this ancient custom. Our father was miserable. His sufferings were pitiful to behold. But Madame Cornouiller did not see them. She saw nothing.

My mother bore it better. She suffered as much as my father, and perhaps more, but she contrived to smile."

"Women are made to suffer," said Zoé.

"Every living creature in the world is born to suffer, Zoé. It was in vain that our parents refused these terrible invitations; Madame Cornouiller's carriage came to fetch them every Sunday afternoon. They were bound to go to Monplaisir; it was an obligation which they could not possibly avoid. It was an established order which only open rebellion could disturb. At length my father revolted, and swore he would not accept another of Madame Cornouiller's invitations. To my mother he left the task of finding decent pretexts and varying reasons for their repeated refusals; it was a task for which she was ill fitted; for she was incapable of dissimulation."

"Say, rather, Lucien, that she was not willing to dissimulate. Had she wished she could have fibbed like anyone else."

"It is true that when she had good reasons she preferred giving them to inventing bad ones. You remember, sister, that one day she said at table: 'Fortunately Zoé has whooping-cough: so we shall not have to go to Monplaisir for a long time.' "

"Yes, that did happen," said Zoé.

"You recovered, Zoé. And one day Madame Cornouiller came and said to our mother: 'My dear, I am counting on you and your husband to dine at Monplaisir on Sunday.' Our mother had been expressly enjoined by her husband to give Madame Cornouiller some plausible pretext for refusing. In her extremity the only excuse she could think of was absolutely devoid of probability: 'I am extremely sorry, madame, but it will be impossible. On Sunday I expect the gardener.'

"At these words Madame Cornouiller looked through the glazed door of the drawing-room at the wilderness of a little garden, where the spindle-trees and the lilacs looked as if they never had and never would make the acquaintance of a pruning-hook. 'You are expecting the gardener! What for? To work in your garden!'

"Then, our mother, having involuntarily cast eyes on the patch of rough grass and half-wild plants, which she had just called a garden, realized with alarm that her excuse must appear a mere invention. 'Why couldn't this man come on Monday or Tuesday to work in your . . . garden? Either of these days would be better. It is wrong to work on Sunday. Is he occupied during the week?'

"I have often noticed that the most impudent and the most absurd reasons meet with the least

resistance; they disconcert the opponent. Madame Cornouiller insisted less than might have been expected of a person so disinclined to give in. Rising from her chair she asked: 'What is your gardener's name, dear?'

" 'Putois,' replied our mother promptly.

"Putois had a name. Henceforth he existed. Madame Cornouiller went off mumbling: 'Putois! I seem to know that name. Putois? Putois! Why, yes, I know him well enough. But I can't recall him. Where does he live? He goes out to work by the day. When people want him, they send for him to some house where he is working. Ah! Just as I thought; he is a loafer, a vagabond . . . a good-for-nothing. You should beware of him, my dear.'

"Henceforth Putois had a character."

II

ONSIEUR GOUBIN and Monsieur Jean Marteau came in. Monsieur Bergeret told them the subject of the conversation:

"We were talking of the man whom my mother one day caused to exist, and created gardener at Saint-Omer. She gave him a name. Henceforth he acted."

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said Monsieur Goubin, wiping his eye-glasses. "Do you mind saying that over again?"

"Willingly," replied Monsieur Bergeret. "There was no gardener. The gardener did not exist. My mother said: 'I expect the gardener!' Straightway the gardener existed—and acted."

"But, Professor," inquired Monsieur Goubin, "how can he have acted if he did not exist?"

"In a manner, he did exist," replied Monsieur Bergeret.

"You mean he existed in imagination," scornfully retorted Monsieur Goubin.

"And is not imaginary existence, existence?" exclaimed the Professor. "Are not mythical person-

ages capable of influencing men? Think of mythology, Monsieur Goubin, and you will perceive that it is not the real characters, but rather the imaginary ones that exercise the profoundest and the most durable influence over our minds. In all times and in all lands, beings who were no more real than Putois, have inspired nations with love and hatred, with terror and hope, they have counselled crimes, they have received offerings, they have moulded manners and laws. Monsieur Goubin, think on the mythology of the ages. Putois is a mythological personage, obscure, I admit, and of the humblest order. The rude satyr, who used to sit at a table with our northern peasants, was deemed worthy to figure in one of Jordaëns' pictures, and in a fable of La Fontaine. The hairy son of Sycorax was introduced into the sublime world of Shakespeare. Putois, less fortunate, will be for ever scorned by poets and artists. He is lacking in grandeur and mystery; he has no distinction, no character. He is the offspring of too rational a mind; he was conceived by persons who knew how to read and write, who lacked the enchanting imagination which gives birth to fables. Gentlemen, I think what I have said is enough to reveal to you the true nature of Putois."

"I understand it," said Monsieur Goubin.

Then Monsieur Bergeret continued:

"Putois existed. I maintain it. He was. Consider, gentlemen, and you will conclude that the condition of being in no way implies matter; it signifies only the connexion between attribute and subject, it expresses merely a relation."

"Doubtless," said Jean Marteau, "but to be without attributes is to be practically nothing. Some one said long ago: 'I am that I am.' Pardon my bad memory; but one can't recollect everything. Whoever it was who spoke thus committed a great imprudence. By those thoughtless words he implied that he was devoid of attributes and without relation, wherefore he asserted his own non-existence and rashly suppressed himself. I wager that he has never been heard of since."

"Then your wager is lost," replied Monsieur Bergeret. "He corrected the bad effect of those egotistical words by applying to himself a whole string of adjectives. He has been greatly talked of, but generally without much sense."

"I don't understand," said Monsieur Goubin.

"That does not matter," replied Jean Marteau.

And he requested Monsieur Bergeret to tell them about Putois.

"It is very kind of you to ask me," said the Professor. "Putois was born in the second half of the

nineteenth century, at Saint-Omer. It would have been better for him had he been born some centuries earlier, in the Forest of Arden or in the Wood of Broceliande. He would then have been an evil spirit of extraordinary cleverness."

"A cup of tea, Monsieur Goubin," said Pauline.

"Was Putois an evil spirit then?" inquired Jean Marteau.

"He was evil," replied Monsieur Bergeret; "in a certain way, and yet not absolutely evil. He was like those devils who are said to be very wicked, but in whom, when one comes to know them, one discovers good qualities. I am disposed to think that justice has not been done to Putois. Madame Cornouiller was prejudiced against him; she immediately suspected him of being a loafer, a drunkard, a thief. Then, reflecting that since he was employed by my mother, who was not rich, he could not ask for high pay, she wondered whether it might not be to her advantage to engage him in the place of her own gardener, who had a better reputation, but also, alas! more requirements. It would soon be the season for trimming the yew-trees. She thought that if Madame Eloi Bergeret, who was poor, paid Putois little, she who was rich might give him still less, since it is the custom for the rich to pay less than the poor. And already in her

mind's eye she beheld her yew-trees cut into walls, spheres and pyramids, all for but a trifling outlay. 'I should look after Putois,' she said to herself, 'and see that he did not loaf and thieve. I risk nothing and save a good deal. These casual labourers sometimes do better than skilled workmen.' She resolved to make the experiment, she said to my mother: 'Send Putois to me, my dear. I will give him work at Monplaisir.' My mother promised. She would willingly have done it. But really it was impossible. Madame Cornouiller expected Putois at Monplaisir and expected him in vain. She was a persistent person, and, once having made a resolve, she was determined to carry it out. When she saw my mother, she complained of having heard nothing of Putois. 'Did you not tell him, my dear, that I was expecting him?' 'Yes, but he is so strange, so erratic . . .' 'Oh! I know that sort of person. I know your Putois through and through. But no workman can be so mad as to refuse to come to work at Monplaisir. My house is well known, I should think. Putois will come for my instructions, and quickly, my dear. Only tell me where he lives; and I will go and find him myself.' My mother replied that she did not know where Putois lived, he was not known to have a home, he was without an address. 'I have not seen

him again, Madame. He seems to have gone into hiding.' She could not have come nearer the truth. And yet Madame Cornouiller listened to her with mistrust. She suspected her of beguiling Putois and keeping him out of sight for fear of losing him or rendering him more exacting. And she mentally pronounced her overselfish. Many a judgment generally accepted and ratified by history has no better foundation."

"That is quite true," said Pauline.

"What is true?" asked Zoé, who was half asleep.

"That the judgments of history are often false. I remember, papa, that you said one day: 'It was very naïve of Madame Roland to appeal to an impartial posterity, and not to see that if her contemporaries were malevolent, those who came after them would be equally so.' "

"Pauline," inquired Mademoiselle Zoé, sternly, "what has that to do with the story of Putois?"

"A great deal, aunt."

"I don't see it."

Monsieur Bergeret, who did not object to digressions, replied to his daughter:

"If every injustice were ultimately repaired in this world, it would never have been necessary to invent another for the purpose. How can posterity judge the dead justly? Into the shades whither

they pass can they be pursued, can they there be questioned? As soon as it is possible to regard them justly they are forgotten. But is it possible ever to be just? What is justice? At any rate, in the end, Madame Cornouiller was obliged to admit that my mother was not deceiving her, and that Putois was not to be found.

"Nevertheless, she did not give up looking for him. Of all her relations, friends, neighbours, servants and tradesmen she inquired whether they knew Putois. Only two or three replied that they had never heard of him. The majority thought they had seen him. 'I have heard the name,' said the cook, 'but I can't put a face to it.' 'Putois! Why! I know him very well,' said the road surveyor, scratching his ear. 'But I couldn't exactly point him out to you.' The most precise information came from Monsieur Blaise, the registrar, who declared that he had employed Putois to chop wood in his yard, from the 19th until the 23rd of October, in the year of the comet.

"One morning, Madame Cornouiller rushed panting into my father's study: 'I have just seen Putois,' she exclaimed. 'Ah! Yes. I've just seen him. Do I think so? But I am sure. He was creeping along by Monsieur Tenchant's wall. He turned into the Rue des Abbesses; he was walking

quickly. Then I lost him. Was it really he? There's no doubt of it. A man about fifty, thin, bent looking like a loafer, wearing a dirty blouse.' 'Such is indeed Putois' description,' said my father. 'Ah! I told you so! Besides, I called him. I cried: Putois! and he turned round. That is what detectives do when they want to make sure of the identity of a criminal they are in search of. Didn't I tell you it was he! . . . I managed to get on his track, your Putois. Well! he is very evil looking. And it was extremely imprudent of you and your wife to employ him. I can read character; and though I only saw his back, I would swear that he is a thief, and perhaps a murderer. His ears are ragged; and that is an infallible sign.' 'Ah! you noticed that his ears were ragged?' 'Nothing escapes me. My dear Monsieur Bergeret, if you don't want to be murdered with your wife and children, don't let Putois come into your house again. Take my advice and have all your locks changed.'

"Now a few days later it happened that Madame Cornouiller had three melons stolen from her kitchen garden. As the thief was not discovered, she suspected Putois. The *gendarmes* were summoned to Monplaisir, and their statements confirmed Madame Cornouiller's suspicions. Just

then gangs of thieves were prowling around the gardens of the countryside. But this time the theft seemed to have been committed by a single person, and with extraordinary skill. He had not damaged anything, and had left no footprint on the moist ground. The delinquent could be none other than Putois. Such was the opinion of the police sergeant who had long known all about Putois, and was making every effort to put his hand on the fellow.

"In the *Journal de Saint-Omer* appeared an article on the three melons of Madame Cornouiller. It contained a description of Putois, according to information obtained in the town. 'His forehead is low,' said the newspaper, 'he is wall-eyed; his look is shifty, he has a crow's foot on the temple, high cheek-bones red and shiny. His ears are ragged. Thin, slightly bent, weak in appearance, in reality he is extraordinarily strong: he can easily bend a five-franc piece between his thumb and forefinger.

" 'There were good reasons,' said the newspaper, 'for attributing to him a long series of robberies perpetrated with marvellous skill.'

"Putois was the talk of the town. One day it was said that he had been arrested and committed to prison. But it was soon discovered that the

man who had been taken for Putois was a pedlar named Rigobert. As nothing could be proved against him, he was discharged after a fortnight's precautionary detention. And still Putois could not be found. Madame Cornouiller fell a victim to another robbery still more audacious than the first. Three silver teaspoons were stolen from her sideboard.

"She recognized the hand of Putois, had a chain put on her bedroom door and lay awake at night."

III

BOUT ten o'clock, when Pauline had gone to bed, Mademoiselle Bergeret said to her brother:

"Don't forget to tell how Putois seduced Madame Cornouiller's cook."

"I was just thinking of it, sister," replied her brother. "To omit that incident would be to omit the best part of the story. But we must come to it in its proper place. The police made a careful search for Putois but they did not find him. When it was known that he could not be found, every one made it a point of honour to discover him; and the malicious succeeded. As there were not a few malicious folk at Saint-Omer and in the neighbourhood, Putois was observed at one and the same time in street, field and wood. Thus, another trait was added to his character. To him was attributed that gift of ubiquity which is possessed by so many popular heroes. A being capable of travelling long distances in a moment, and of appearing suddenly in the place where he is least expected, is naturally alarming. Putois was the terror of Saint-Omer.

Madame Cornouiller, convinced that Putois had robbed her of three melons and three teaspoons, barricaded herself at Monplaisir and lived in perpetual fear. Bars, bolts and locks were powerless to reassure her. Putois was for her a terribly subtle creature, who could pass through closed doors. A domestic event redoubled her alarm. Her cook was seduced; and a time came when she could conceal her fault no longer. But she obstinately refused to indicate her betrayer."

"Her name was Gudule," said Mademoiselle Zoé.

"Her name was Gudule; and she was thought to be protected against the perils of love by a long and forked beard. A beard, which suddenly appeared on the chin of that saintly royal maiden venerated at Prague, protected her virginity. A beard, which was no longer young, sufficed not to protect the virtue of Gudule. Madame Cornouiller urged Gudule to utter the name of the man who had betrayed her and then abandoned her to distress. Gudule burst into tears, but refused to speak. Threats and entreaties were alike useless. Madame Cornouiller made a long and minute inquiry. She diplomatically questioned her neighbours—both men and women—the tradesmen, the

gardener, the road surveyor, the *gendarmes;* nothing put her on the track of the culprit. Again she endeavoured to extract a full confession from Gudule. 'In your own interest, Gudule, tell me who it is.' Gudule remained silent. Suddenly Madame Cornouiller had a flash of enlightenment: 'It is Putois!' The cook wept and said nothing. 'It is Putois! Why did I not guess it before? It is Putois! You unhappy girl! Oh you poor, unhappy girl!'

"Henceforth Madame Cornouiller was persuaded that Putois was the father of her cook's child. Every one at Saint-Omer, from the President of the Tribunal to the lamplighter's mongrel dog, knew Gudule and her basket. The news that Putois had seduced Gudule filled the town with laughter, astonishment and admiration. Putois was hailed as an irresistible lady-killer and the lover of the eleven thousand virgins. On these slight grounds there was ascribed to him the paternity of five or six other children born that year, who, considering the happiness that awaited them and the joy they brought to their mothers, would have done just as well not to put in an appearance. Among others were included the servant of Monsieur Maréchal, who kept the general shop with the sign of 'Le

Rendezvous des Pêcheurs,' a baker's errand girl, and the little cripple of the Pont-Biquet, who had all fallen victims to Putois' charms. 'The monster!' cried the gossips.

"Thus Putois, invisible satyr, threatened with woes irretrievable all the maidens of a town, wherein, according to the oldest inhabitants, virgins had from time immemorial lived free from danger.

"Though celebrated thus throughout the city and its neighbourhood, he continued in a subtle manner to be associated especially with our home. He passed by our door, and it was believed that from time to time he climbed over our garden wall. He was never seen face to face. But we were constantly recognizing his shadow, his voice, his footprints. More than once, in the twilight, we thought we saw his back at the bend of the road. My sister and I were changing our opinions of him. He remained wicked and malevolent, but he was becoming child-like and simple. He was growing less real, and, if I may say so, more poetical. He was about to be included in the naïve cycle of children's fairy tales. He was turning into Croquemitaine, into Père Fouettard, into the dustman who shuts little children's eyes at night. He was not that sprite who by night entangles the colt's tail in

the stable. Not so rustic or so charming, yet he was just as frankly mischievous; he used to draw ink moustaches on my sister's dolls. In our beds we used to hear him before we went to sleep: he was caterwauling on the roofs with the cats, he was barking with the dogs; he was groaning in the mill-hopper; he was mimicking the songs of belated drunkards in the street.

"What rendered Putois present and familiar to us, what interested us in him was that his memory was associated with all the objects that surrounded us. Zoé's dolls, my exercise-books, the pages of which he had so often blotted and crumpled, the garden wall over which we had seen his red eyes gleam in the shadow, the blue flower-pot one winter's night cracked by him if it were not by the frost; trees, streets, benches, everything reminded us of Putois, our Putois, the children's Putois, a being local and mythical. In grace and in poetry he fell far short of the most awkward wild man of the woods, of the uncouthest Sicilian or Thessalian faun. But he was a demi-god all the same.

"To our father Putois' character appeared very differently, it was symbolical and had a philosophical signification. Our father had a vast pity for humanity. He did not think men very reasonable.

Their errors, when they were not cruel, entertained and amused him. The belief in Putois interested him as a compendium and abridgment of all the beliefs of humanity. Our father was ironical and sarcastic; he spoke of Putois as if he were an actual being. He was sometimes so persistent, and described each detail with such precision, that our mother was quite astonished. 'Anyone would say that you are serious, my love,' she would say frankly, 'and yet you know perfectly . . .' He replied gravely, 'The whole of Saint-Omer believes in the existence of Putois. Could I be a good citizen and deny it? One must think well before suppressing an article of universal belief.'

"Only very clear-headed persons are troubled by such scruples. At heart my father was a follower of Gassendi. He compromised between his individual views and those of the public: with the Saint-Omerites he believed in the existence of Putois, but he did not admit his direct intervention in the theft of the melons and the seduction of the cook. In short, like a good citizen he professed his faith in the existence of Putois, and he dispensed with Putois when explaining the events which happened in the town. Wherefore, in this case as in all others, he proved himself a good man and a thoughtful.

"As for our mother, she felt herself in a way re-

sponsible for the birth of Putois, and she was right. For in reality Putois was born of our mother's taradiddle, as Caliban was born of a poet's invention. The two crimes, of course, differed greatly in magnitude, and my mother's guilt was not so great as Shakespeare's. Nevertheless, she was alarmed and dismayed at seeing so tiny a falsehood grow indefinitely, and so trifling a deception meet with a success so prodigious that it stopped nowhere, spread throughout the whole town, and threatened to spread throughout the whole world. One day she grew pale, believing that she was about to see her fib rise in person before her. On that day, her servant, who was new to the house and neighbourhood, came and told her that a man was asking for her. He wanted, he said, to speak to Madame. 'What kind of a man is he?' 'A man in a blouse. He looked like a country labourer.' 'Did he give his name?' 'Yes, Madame.' 'Well, what is it?' 'Putois.' 'Did he tell you that that was his name?' 'Putois, yes Madame.' 'And he is here?' 'Yes, Madame. He is waiting in the kitchen.' 'You have seen him?' 'Yes, Madame.' 'What does he want?' 'He did not say. He will only tell Madame.' 'Go and ask him.'

"When the servant returned to the kitchen, Putois was no longer there. This meeting between

Putois and the new servant was never explained. But I think that from that day my mother began to believe that Putois might possibly exist, and that perhaps she had not invented."

RIQUET

TO A. J.-A. COULANGHEON

RIQUET

UARTER-DAY had come. With his sister and daughter, Monsieur Bergeret was leaving the dilapidated old house in the Rue de Seine to take up his abode in a modern flat in the Rue de Vaugirard. Such was the decision of Zoé and the Fates.

During the long hours of the morning, Riquet wandered sadly through the devastated rooms. His most cherished habits were upset. Strange men, badly dressed, rude and foul-mouthed, disturbed his repose. They penetrated even to the kitchen where they stepped into his dish of biscuit and his bowl of fresh water. The chairs were carried off as fast as he curled himself up on them; the carpets were pulled roughly from under his weary limbs. There was no abiding-place for him, not even in his own home.

To his credit, be it said, that at first he attempted resistance. When the cistern was carried off he barked furiously at the enemy. But no one responded to his appeal; no one encouraged him, there was no doubt about it his efforts were re-

garded with disapproval. Mademoiselle Zoé said to him sharply: "Be quiet!" And Mademoiselle Pauline added: "Riquet, you are silly!"

Henceforth he would abstain from useless warnings. He would cease to strive alone for the public weal. In silence he deplored the devastation of the household. From room to room he sought in vain for a little quiet. When the furniture removers penetrated into a room where he had taken refuge, he prudently hid beneath an as yet unmolested table or chest of drawers. But this precaution proved worse than useless; for soon the piece of furniture tottered over him, rose, then fell with a crash threatening to crush him. Terrified, with his hair all turned up the wrong way, he fled to another refuge no safer than the first.

But these inconveniences and even dangers were as nothing to the agony he was suffering at heart. His sentiments were the most deeply affected.

The household furniture he regarded not as things inert, but as living benevolent creatures, beneficent spirits, whose departure foreshadowed cruel misfortunes. Dishes, sugar-basins, pots and pans, all the kitchen divinities; arm-chairs, carpets, cushions, all the fetishes of the hearth, its lares and its domestic gods had vanished. He could not be-

lieve that so great a disaster would ever be repaired. And sorrow filled his little heart to overflowing. Fortunately Riquet's heart resembled human hearts in being easily distracted and quick to forget its misfortunes.

During the long absence of the thirsty workmen, when old Angélique's broom raised ancient dust from the floor, Riquet breathed an odour of mice and watched the flight of a spider; thus was his versatile mind diverted. But he soon relapsed into sadness.

On the day of departure, when he beheld things growing hourly worse and worse, he grew desperate. It seemed to him above all things disastrous when he saw the linen being piled in dark cases. Pauline with eager haste was putting her frock into a trunk. He turned away from her, as if she were doing something wrong. He shrank up against the wall and thought to himself: "Now the worst has come; this is the end of everything." Then, whether it were that he believed things ceased to exist when he did not see them, or whether he was simply avoiding a painful sight, he took care not to look in Pauline's direction. It chanced that as she was passing to and fro she noticed Riquet's attitude. It was sad: but to her it seemed funny,

and she began to laugh. Then, still laughing, she called out: "Come here! Riquet, come to me!" But he did not stir from his corner, and would not even turn his head. He was not then in the mood to caress his young mistress, and, through some secret instinct, through a kind of presentiment, he was afraid of approaching the gaping trunk. Pauline called him several times. Then, as he did not respond, she went and took him up in her arms. "How unhappy we are!" she said to him; "what is wrong then?" Her tone was ironical. Riquet did not understand irony. He lay in Pauline's arms, sad and inert, affecting to see nothing and to hear nothing. "Riquet, look at me!" She said it three times and three times in vain. Then, pretending to be in a rage: "Silly creature," she cried, "in with you"; and she threw him into the trunk and shut the lid on him. At that moment her aunt having called her, she went out of the room, leaving Riquet in the trunk.

He was seized with wild alarm; for he was very far from supposing that he had been playfully thrown into the trunk for a mere joke. Esteeming his situation about as bad as it could be, he was desirous not to make it worse by any imprudence. So he remained motionless for a few moments, holding his breath. Then he deemed it expedient to

explore his dark prison. With his paws he felt the skirts and the linen on to which he had been so cruelly precipitated, endeavouring to find some way out of this terrible place. He had been thus engaged for two or three minutes, when he was called by Monsieur Bergeret, who had been getting ready to go out.

"Riquet! Riquet! Come for a walk on the quays, that is the land of glory. True they have disfigured it by erecting a railway station of hideous proportions and striking ugliness. Architecture is a lost art. They have pulled down a nice looking house at the corner of the Rue du Bac. They will doubtless put some unsightly building in its place. I trust that at least our architects may abstain from introducing on to the Quai d'Orsay that barbarous style of which they have given such a horrid example at the corner of the Rue Washington and the Champs Élysées! . . . Riquet! Riquet! Come for a walk on the quays. That is a glorious land. But architecture has deteriorated sadly since the days of Gabriel and of Louis. . . . Where is the dog? . . . Riquet! Riquet?"

The sound of Monsieur Bergeret's voice was a great consolation to Riquet. He replied by making a noise with his paws, scratching frantically against the wicker sides of the trunk.

"Where is the dog?" her father asked Pauline as she was returning with a pile of linen in her arms.

"He is in the trunk, Papa."

"What, in the trunk! Why is he there?" asked Monsieur Bergeret.

"Because he was silly," replied Pauline.

Monsieur Bergeret liberated his friend. Riquet followed him into the hall, wagging his tail. Then a sudden thought occurred to him. He went back into the room, ran up to Pauline and rubbed against her skirt. And not until he had wildly caressed her as evidence of his loyalty did he rejoin his master on the staircase. He would have felt himself deficient in wisdom and religious feeling had he failed to display these signs of affection to one who had been so powerful as to plunge him into a deep trunk.

In the street, Monsieur Bergeret and his dog beheld the sad sight of their household furniture scattered over the pavement. The removers had gone off to the public-house round the corner, leaving the plate-glass mirror of Mademoiselle Zoé's wardrobe to reflect the passing procession of girls, workmen, shopkeepers, and Beaux Arts students, of drays, carts and cabs, and the chemist's shop with

its bottles and its serpents of Æsculapius. Leaning against a post was Monsieur Bergeret senior, smiling in his frame, mild, pale and delicate looking, with his hair ruffled. With affectionate respect the son contemplated his parent whom he moved away from the post. He likewise lifted out of harm's way Zoé's little table, which looked ashamed at finding itself in the street.

Meanwhile Riquet was patting his master's legs with his paws, looking up at him with sorrowing beautiful eyes, which seemed to say:

"Thou, who wert once so rich and so powerful, canst thou have become poor? Canst thou have lost thy power, O my Master? Thou permittest men clothed in vile rags to invade thy sitting-room, thy bedroom, thy dining-room, to throw themselves upon thy furniture and pull it out of doors, to drag down the staircase thy deep arm-chair, thy chair and mine, for in it we repose side by side in the evening and sometimes in the morning too. I heard it groan in the arms of those tatterdemalions; that chair which is a fetish and a benignant spirit. Thou didst offer no resistance to the invaders. But if thou dost no longer possess any of those genii who once filled thy dwelling, if thou hast lost all, even those little divinities, which thou didst put on

in the morning when getting out of bed, those slippers which I used to bite in my play, if thou art indigent and poor, O my Master, then what will become of me?"

THE MEDITATIONS OF RIQUET

THE MEDITATIONS OF RIQUET

I

EN, beasts and stones grow great as they come near and loom enormous when they are upon me. It is not so with me. I remain equally great wheresoever I am.

II

When my master places for me beneath the table the food which he was about to put into his own mouth, it is in order that he may tempt me and that he may punish me if I yield to temptation. For I cannot believe that he would deny himself for my sake.

III

The smell of dogs is sweet in the nostrils.

IV

My master keeps me warm when I lie behind him in his chair. It is because he is a god. In front of the fire-place is a hot stone. That stone is divine.

V

I speak when I please. From my master's mouth proceed likewise sounds which make sense. But his meaning is not so clear as that expressed by the sounds of my voice. Every sound that I utter has a meaning. From my master's lips come forth many idle noises. It is difficult but necessary to divine the thoughts of the master.

VI

To eat is good. To have eaten is better. For the enemy who lieth in wait to take your food is quick and crafty.

VII

All is flux and reflux. I alone remain.

VIII

I am in the centre of all things; men, beasts and things, friendly and adverse, are ranged about me.

IX

In sleep one beholdeth men, dogs, horses, trees, forms pleasant and unpleasant. When one awaketh these forms have vanished.

X

Reflection. I love my master, Bergeret, because he is powerful and terrible.

XI

An action for which one has been beaten is a bad action. An action for which one has received caresses or food is a good action.

XII

At nightfall evil powers prowl round the house.

I bark in order that my master may be warned and drive them away.

XIII

Prayer. O my master, Bergeret, god of courage, I adore thee. When thou art terrible, be thou praised. When thou art kind be thou praised. I crouch at thy feet: I lick thy hands. When, seated before thy table spread, thou devourest meats in abundance, thou art very great and very beautiful. Very great art thou and very beautiful when, striking fire out of a thin splint of wood, thou changest night into day. Keep me in thine house and keep out every other dog. And thou, Angélique, the cook, divinity good and great, I fear thee and I venerate thee in order that thou mayest give me much to eat.

XIV

A dog who lacketh piety towards men and who scorneth the fetishes assembled in his master's house liveth a miserable and a wandering life.

XV

One day, from a broken pitcher, filled with water

which was being carried across the parlour, water ran on to the polished floor. A thrashing must have been the punishment of that dirty pitcher.

XVI

Men possess the divine power of opening all doors. I by myself am only able to open a few. Doors are great fetishes which do not readily obey dogs.

XVII

The life of a dog is full of danger. If he would escape suffering he must be ever on the watch, during meals and even during sleep.

XVIII

It is impossible to know whether one has acted well towards men. One must worship them without seeking to understand them. Their wisdom is mysterious.

XIX

Invocation. O Fear, Fear august and maternal,

Fear sacred and salutary, possess me, in danger fill me, in order that I may avoid that which is harmful, lest, casting myself upon the enemy, I suffer for my imprudence.

XX

Vehicles there are which horses pull through the street. They are terrible. Other vehicles there are which move themselves breathing loudly. These are also fearful. Men in rags are detestable, likewise such as carry baskets on their heads or roll casks. I do not love children who utter loud cries and flee from and pursue each other swiftly in the streets. The world is full of hostile and dreadful things.

THE NECKTIE

TO MADAME FÉLIX DECORI

THE NECKTIE

ONSIEUR BERGERET was hammering nails into the wall of his new flat. Becoming aware that he was enjoying the work, he began to wonder why it gave him pleasure to knock nails into the wall. He found the reason and lost the pleasure. For the pleasure had consisted in hammering the nails without thinking of the reason of anything. Then, as he hung his father's portrait in the place of honour in the drawing-room, he meditated on the sorrows of a philosophical mind.

"It tips forward too much," said Zoé.

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. It looks as if it were going to fall."

Monsieur Bergeret shortened the cord from which the picture hung.

"It isn't straight," said Mademoiselle Bergeret.

"Is it not?"

"No it hangs perceptibly too much to the left."

Monsieur Bergeret carefully readjusted it.

"And now how is it?"

"It hangs too much to the right."

Monsieur Bergeret did his best to bring the picture-frame into line with the horizon, and then drew back three steps in order to inspect his handiwork.

"I think it is right," he said.

"It is all right now," said Zoé. "It worries me when a picture isn't straight."

"You are not the only one whom it worries, Zoé. There are many who feel like you. Any irregularity in simple matters is irritating because it is so easy to see the difference between what is and what ought to be. Some people cannot bear to see a badly hung wall-paper. The conditions of our humanity are indeed terrible and atrocious when a crooked picture frame upsets us."

"There is nothing extraordinary in that, Lucien. Little things occupy a large place in life. You yourself are constantly interested in trifles."

"All the years that I have been gazing at this portrait I have never remarked before what strikes me at this moment. I have just perceived that this portrait of our father is the portrait of a young man."

"Why, of course, Lucien. When the artist Gosselin on his return from Rome, painted father, he was not more than thirty."

"True, sister. But when I was a boy the portrait appeared to me that of a man well on in years, and that impression clung to me. Now it has suddenly vanished. The colours of Gosselin's picture have lost their brightness; the flesh has assumed an amber tint under the varnish; the lines have grown vague, merging into shadow of an olive hue. Our father's face seems to retreat further and further into a far-distant background. But that smooth forehead, those large bright eyes, the clear pure line of the delicate cheeks, the black hair thick and shining, belong, I see it now for the first time, to a man in the flower of his youth."

"Certainly," said Zoé.

"His dress and the style of his hair are those of the old days when he was young. He wears his hair ruffled. His bottle-green coat has a high collar, he wears a nankin waistcoat and his broad black silk stock tie is wound three times round his neck."

"Ten years ago old men were still to be seen wearing ties like that," said Zoé.

"Possibly," said Monsieur Bergeret. "But it is certain that Monsieur Malorey never wore any others."

"You mean the Dean of the Faculté des Lettres at Saint-Omer, Lucien. . . . It is thirty years and more since his death."

"He was over sixty, Zoé, when I was less than twelve—but it was then that I committed a most daring outrage on his tie."

"I think I remember that rather stupid joke," said Zoé.

"No. Zoé, you do not remember my joke. If you did you would not speak of it like that. You know that Monsieur Malorey was very particular about his personal appearance and that he was always very dignified. You remember also that he was extremely decorous. He had an old-fashioned way of speaking, which was delightful. One day when he had invited our parents to dinner for the second time he himself offered a dish of artichokes to our mother, saying: 'Just a little more of the underpart, Madame.' He was speaking according to the best traditions of politeness and of language. For our ancestors never spoke of 'the bottom of an artichoke.' But the term was antiquated and our mother had great difficulty to keep from laughing. I cannot remember, Zoé, how we came to know the artichoke story."

Zoé, who was hemming white curtains, replied: "We heard it because our father related it one day without noticing that we were present."

"And ever afterwards, Zoé, you could never see Monsieur Malorey without wanting to laugh."

"You laughed also."

"No, Zoé, I did not laugh at that. That which amuses other men does not make me laugh, that which amuses me does not make other men laugh. I have often noticed it. I see the ludicrous where no one else perceives it. I am gay and I am sad in the wrong places, and it has often made me look like a fool."

Monsieur Bergeret climbed a ladder in order to hang a view of Mount Vesuvius by night, during an eruption; the picture was a water-colour which he had inherited from a paternal ancestor.

"But I have not told, you sister, what I said to Monsieur Malorey."

"Lucien, while you are on the ladder, please put up the curtain-rods," said Zoé.

"I will," said her brother. "We were then living in a little house in a suburb of Saint-Omer."

"The curtain-rings are in the nail-box."

"I have them. . . . A little house with a garden."

"A very pretty garden," said Zoé. "It was full of lilac bushes. On the lawn was a vase in terra cotta, at the end a maze, and a grotto rockery, and on the wall two large blue pots."

"Yes, Zoé, two large blue pots. One morning, one summer morning, Monsieur Malorey came to

our house to consult some books that were not in his own library and which he could not have found in the town library, because it had been destroyed in a fire. My father had placed his study at the Dean's disposal and the offer had been accepted. It was arranged that when he had collated his texts he would stay and lunch with us."

"Just see if the curtains are too long, Lucien."

"I will. . . .

"That morning the heat was stifling. Among the still leaves even the birds were silent. Sitting under a tree in the garden, I perceived in the shaded study the back of Monsieur Malorey and his long hair resting on the collar of his frock-coat. Save that his hand was moving over a sheet of paper, he did not stir. There was nothing extraordinary in that. He was writing. But what did appear to me unusual . . ."

"Well, are they long enough?"

"Not by four inches, my good Zoé."

"What, four inches? Show me, Lucien."

"Look. . . . What did appear to me unusual was to see Monsieur Malorey's tie on the window-sill. Overcome by the heat, the Dean had unwound the black cravat that three times encircled his neck. And the long piece of black silk hung from side to side out of the open window. I was seized with an

uncontrollable desire to take it. I crept softly up to the wall of the house, I stretched my arm towards the tie, I pulled it; nothing stirred in the study; I pulled it again; there it was in my hand; I went and hid it in one of the large blue pots in the garden."

"It was not a very brilliant joke, Lucien."

"No. . . . I hid it in one of the large blue pots and I took care to cover it with leaves and moss. Monsieur Malorey continued for some time at work in the study. I watched his motionless back and the long white hair flowing over the collar of his frock-coat. Then the servant called me to lunch. As I entered the dining-room the most unexpected sight met my gaze. Between our father and mother I saw Monsieur Malorey grave, calm, but without his necktie. He had all his usual dignity. He was even august. But he was not wearing his tie. This filled me with surprise. I knew he could not be wearing it since it was in the blue pot. And yet I was prodigiously astonished to see him without it. 'I cannot think, Madame,' he said softly to our mother. . . . She interrupted him: 'My husband will lend you one, dear sir.'

"And I reflected: 'I hid it in jest, he failed to find it in earnest.' But I was astonished."

THE MONTIL MANŒUVRES

TO OCTAVE MIRBEAU

THE MONTIL MANŒUVRES

HE engagement had begun; everything was going well. At ten o'clock in the morning General Decuir, of the southern army, whose brigade occupied a strong position beneath the woods of Saint-Colomban, effected a brilliant reconnaissance which demonstrated the absence of the enemy. Then the soldiers broke their fast, and the General, leaving his escort at Saint-Luchaire, drove, accompanied by Captain Varnot, in the motor-car which had come to fetch him, to the Château de Montil, where the Baronne de Bonmont had invited him to lunch. The village of Montil was hung with flags. At the entrance to the park, the General passed beneath a triumphal arch erected in his honour and decorated with flags, trophies and branches of oak interwoven with boughs of laurel.

On the steps of her castle the Baronne de Bonmont received the General and led him into a vast hall hung with weapons and glittering with steel.

"Your residence is superb, Madame, and the country is beautiful," said the General. "I have

often been to shoot about here, chiefly with the Brécés, where I had the pleasure of meeting your son, if I am not mistaken."

"No, you are not mistaken," said Ernest de Bonmont, who had driven the General from Saint-Luchaire. "And to say one is bored at the Brécés is to put it mildly!"

It was a small luncheon party. Besides the General, the Captain, the Baronne and her son, there were only Madame Worms-Clavelin and Joseph Lacrisse.

"You must take things as you find them!" said Madame de Bonmont placing the General on her right at a table decorated with flowers over which towered an equestrian statue of Napoleon in Sèvres porcelain.

At a glance the General took in the long gallery hung with the finest Van Orley tapestries.

"You have plenty of room here!"

"The General might have brought his brigade," said the Captain.

"I should have been delighted to receive it," replied the Baronne smiling.

The talk was simple, quiet and cordial. Every one had the good taste to avoid politics. The General was a royalist. He did not say so, but it was

well known. His manners were perfect. His two sons had been arrested for crying: "Panama!" on the boulevards when President Loubet came into office. The General's own attitude had always been discreet. Horses and cannon were the topics of conversation.

"The new 75 is a gem," said the General.

"One cannot too highly commend the ease with which the firing is regulated. It is really wonderful," added Captain Varnot.

"And during the manœuvres," said Madame Worms-Clavelin, "by a new and ingenious arrangement the covers of the ammunition wagons serve as a shelter for the gunners."

Madame la Préfète was congratulated on her military knowledge.

Madame Worms-Clavelin appeared to equal advantage when she spoke of Notre-Dame des Belles-Feuilles.

"You know, General, that in this department, no further away than Brécé, we have a miraculous statue of the Blessed Virgin."

"I have heard of it," replied the General.

"Before he was made a Bishop," continued Madame Worms-Clavelin, "the Abbé Guitrel was greatly interested in the apparitions of Notre-Dame

des Belles-Feuilles. He even wrote a little book to prove that Notre-Dame des Belles-Feuilles is the special protectress of the French army."

"Tell me where I can procure a copy and I will read it," said the General.

Madame Worms-Clavelin promised to send him the book.

In short throughout the meal not a word was uttered that could be called offensive or tending to the malicious. After lunch, there was a walk in the park. Then Captain Varnot took his leave.

"Let my escort wait for me at Saint-Luchaire, Captain," said the General. And turning to Lacrisse, he said:

"Manœuvres are a picture of war, but they are not a true picture because everything is thought out and planned whereas in war it is the unexpected that happens."

"Will you come and see the pheasantry, General?" said Madame de Bonmont.

"With pleasure, Madame."

She turned round.

"Are you not coming, Ernest?"

Ernest had been stopped on his way by the worthy Raulin, mayor of Montil.

"Excuse me, Baron," he was saying. "But if

you could say a word to General Decuir for me, if only the artillery would pass over St. John's Hill, across my lucerne field."

"What! Haven't you a good crop, Raulin? Is that why you want it trampled on?"

"Not at all, not at all. The crop is excellent, Baron; the harvest next month promises to be good. But compensation is good also. Last time it was Houssiaux who had it. Isn't it my turn now? I am mayor, I bear all the burdens of the commune, is it not fair therefore that when there is any bonus to be given. . . . ?"

The General was taken to the pheasantry.

"It is time," he said, "that I rejoined my brigade."

"Oh! You will reach it in no time with my thirty horse-power," said the young baron.

They inspected the kennels, the stables and the gardens.

"Your roses are superb," said the General, who was fond of flowers. Through the perfumed air there boomed the sound of cannon.

"It has a festal sound and uplifts the heart," said Lacrisse.

"Like the sound of bells," said Madame Worms-Clavelin.

"You are a true Frenchwoman, Madame," said

the General. "Every word you utter breathes the purest patriotism."

It was four o'clock. The General could not stay a minute longer. Fortunately in "the thirty horse-power" he would reach his brigade in no time.

With the young baron, Lacrisse and the chauffeur he entered the car, and once again passed beneath his triumphal arch.

In forty minutes he was at Saint-Luchaire. But his escort was not there. In vain the four motorists looked for Captain Varnot. The village was deserted. Not a soldier to be found. A butcher was passing in his cart. They asked him where Decuir's division was: he replied:

"Try the Cagny road. Just now I heard firing in the direction of Cagny, and it was loud too, I can assure you."

"Cagny, where is that?" inquired the General.

"Don't you trouble, I know," said the Baron. "I will drive you there."

And, as the drive would be a long one, he gave the General a dust-coat, a cap and goggles.

They started on the departmental road; they passed Saint-André, Villeneuve, Letaf, Saint-Porçain, Truphême, Mirange, and they saw the Cagny pond shining like brass in the light of the

setting sun. On the high-road, they met dragoons of the northern army who knew nothing of the whereabouts of the Decuir brigade, but they maintained that the southern army was engaged at Saint-Paulain.

Saint-Paulain was forty-five kilometres distant, in the direction of Montil.

The car turned round, went back the departmental road, returned through Mirange, Truphême, Saint-Porçain, Letaf, Villeneuve and Saint-André.

"Put on more speed," ordered the Baron.

And the car passed through the streets of Verry-les-Fougerais, Suttières and Rary-la-Vicomté, raising a cloud of dust golden like a glory and crushing pigs and poultry. Two kilometres from Saint-Paulain, they came on the outposts of the southern army holding La Saulaie, Mesville and Le Sourdais. There they learned that the whole of the northern army was on the other side of the Ilette.

They drove towards Torcy-la-Mirande in order to strike the river by the heights of Vieux-Bac.

When in the course of an hour they began to perceive by the evening light a sheet of white mist hanging over the low lying meadows:

"Gad," said the young Baron, "we can't cross: the Ilette Bridge is destroyed."

"What!" exclaimed the General, "the Ilette Bridge destroyed? What's that you say? The Bridge destroyed!"

"Why, General! yes. In the plan of the manœuvers the Bridge is destroyed in theory."

The General did not appreciate the joke.

"I admire your wit young man," he said sharply.

At Vieux-Bac they thundered across the iron bridge and followed the ancient Roman road, which connects Torcy-la-Mirande with the chief town of the department. In the sky, Venus was kindling her silver flame close by the crescent moon. They travelled about thirty kilometres without meeting any troops. At Saint-Évariste there was a terrible hill to climb. The car groaned like a tired beast, but did not stop. Coming down it went over some stones and was on the point of capsizing in a ditch. Then the road was excellent as far as Mallemanche, where they arrived at night, during a surprise.

The sky was glittering with stars. Trumpets were sounding. Lanterns were casting a yellow gleam on the blue road. Foot soldiers were pillaging the houses. The inhabitants were at the windows.

"Although merely theoretical it is all extremely impressive," said Lacrisse.

The General was told that his brigade was in

possession of Villeneuve on the left wing of the victorious army. The enemy was in full retreat.

Villeneuve is at the junction of the Ilette and the Claine, twenty kilometres from Mallemanche.

"We must make for Villeneuve!" said the General. "At last we know what we have to do, and a good thing too."

The Villeneuve road was so encumbered with artillery, ammunition wagons and gunners asleep and wrapped in their great cloaks, that it was very difficult for the car to thread its way. A canten-woman sitting in a cart decorated with Chinese lanterns hailed the motorists and offered them coffee and liqueurs.

"We won't say no," replied the General.

"We have swallowed dust enough during the manœuvers."

They drank a liqueur and pressed on to Villeneuve, which was occupied by the infantry.

"But where is my brigade?" cried the General, who was growing anxious.

They questioned eagerly all the officers they met. But no one could give them news of the Decuir brigade.

"What! no news? Then it is not at Villeneuve? Incredible!"

"Gentlemen," they heard in a woman's voice,

shrill and bell-like. They looked up and beheld a head studded with curl-papers; it belonged to the postmistress.

"Gentlemen, there are two Villeneuves. This is Villeneuve-sur-Claine. Perhaps it is Villeneuve-la-Bataille that you want."

"Perhaps," said the Baron.

"That is a long way off," said the postmistress. "You must go first to Montil. . . . Do you know Montil?"

"Yes," replied the Baron, "we know Montil."

"Then you go on to Saint-Michel-du-Mont; you take the main road and . . ."

From the window of a neighbouring house with gilded scutcheons came out a head wrapped in a comforter:

"Gentlemen . . ."

And the notary of Villeneuve-sur-Claine gave his advice:

"To reach Villeneuve-la-Bataille, you would do better to cross through the Forest of Tongues. . . . You go to La Croix du Perron, you turn to the right . . ."

"That's enough. I know the Forest of Tongues," said the Baron, "I have hunted there with the Brécés. . . . Thank you, sir. . . . Thank you, Mademoiselle."

"Don't mention it," said the postmistress.

"At your service, gentlemen," said the notary.

"What if we went to the inn and had a cocktail?" said the Baron.

"I should like something to eat," said Lacrisse. "I am done up."

"Courage, gentlemen," said the General. "We will make up for it at Villeneuve-la-Bataille."

And they started. They passed through Vély, La Roche, Les Saules, Meulette, La Taillerie and entered the Forest of Tremble. A dazzling light ran before them into the shades of night and of the forest. They reached La Croix-du-Perron, then the Roi-Henri cross-roads. They fled wildly through the silence and solitude. They saw the deer glide by and the lights in the charcoal-burners' huts. Suddenly in a deep cutting the ominous noise of an explosion made them shudder. The car skidded and knocked up against a tree.

"What is the matter?" asked the General, who had been thrown head over heels.

Lacrisse groaned; he was lying on a bed of fern.

But Ernest, lantern in hand, was saying dismally:

"The tyre has burst. . . . But worse than that the front wheel is twisted."

ÉMILE

ÉMILE

ADEMOISELLE BERGERET was silent. She smiled, which was unusual.

"Why are you laughing, Zoé?" asked Monsieur Bergeret.

"I was thinking of Émile Vincent."

"What Zoé! You can think of that excellent man, whom we have just lost, whom we loved and whom we mourn, and you can laugh!"

"I laugh because I can see him again as he used to be, and the old memories are the strongest. But you should know, Lucien, that all smiles are not joyful any more than all tears are sorrowful. It takes an old maid to explain that."

"I am not unaware, Zoé, that laughter is the result of nervous agitation. Madame de Custine as she bade adieu in the prison to her husband condemned to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal, was seized with a fit of uncontrollable laughter at the sight of a prisoner walking past her in dressing-gown and night-cap, with his face painted and a candle in his hand."

"That is not the same thing," said Zoé.

"No," replied Monsieur Bergeret. "But I remember what happened to me when I heard of the death of poor Demay who used to sing comic songs at the cafés concerts. It was one evening during a reception at the Prefecture. Worms-Clavelin said: 'Demay is dead.'

"I for my part received the tidings in decorous sadness. And, reflecting that never again should I hear that wondrous woman sing: *Je cas' des noisett's en m'asseyant d'ssus,** I tasted to the dregs all the melancholy the thought engendered. I let it drip into my soul and relapsed into silence. The Chief Secretary, Monsieur Lacarelle, exclaimed in his deep voice, through his military moustache: 'Demay dead! What a loss to the gaiety of France!' 'It was in the evening paper,' said Judge Pilloux. 'True,' added General Cartier de Chalmot gently, 'and I am informed that she died consoled by the rites of the Church.'

"At the General's simple words suddenly a strange, incongruous vision flashed before my eyes. I imagined the end of the world as it is described in the 'Dies Irae,' according to the testimony of David and the Sibyl. I beheld the age reduced to ashes; I saw the dead issuing forth from their tombs, and, at the angel's summons, crowding be-

*I crack nuts by sitting on them.

fore the Judgment Seat, and the massive Demay mother-naked at the Lord's right hand. At this conception I burst out laughing in the presence of the astonished officials civil and military. But worse still, the vision obsessed me and I added between bursts of laughter: 'You will see that by her very presence, she will upset the solemnity of the Last Judgment.' Never, Zoé, were words less comprehensible, less relevant."

"You are absurd, Lucien. I never have those curious visions. I smiled because I imagined our poor friend Vincent just as he was in life. That was all. It was quite natural. I mourn for him with all my heart. We never had a better friend."

"I too was very fond of him, Zoé, and I too when I think of him am tempted to smile. It was strange how so much military ardour came to reside in so small a body and how a soul so heroic could dwell in a form so spruce and plump. His life passed quietly in the suburb of a provincial town. He was a brushmaker at Les Tintelleries. But there was room in his heart for something besides his business."

"He was even smaller than Uncle Jean," said Mademoiselle Bergeret.

"And he was martial, he was civic, he was imperial," said Monsieur Bergeret.

"He was a very excellent man," said Mademoiselle Bergeret.

"He was in the war of 1870, Zoé. In that year he was twenty. I was only twelve. He seemed to me old and full of years. One day in the Terrible Year, he entered our peaceful provincial dwelling with the clashing of steel. He came to bid us farewell. He was dressed in the startling uniform of a *franc-tireur*. Protruding from his scarlet belt were the butts of two horse-pistols. And because a smile must enter even into the most tragic moments, the unconscious humour of some unknown armourer had hitched him to an enormous cavalry sword. Do not blame me for the expression, Zoé; it occurs in one of Cicero's letters. 'Whoever,' says the orator, 'hitched my son-in-law to that sword?'

"What astonished me most in the equipment of our friend Émile Vincent was this huge sword. To my childish mind it seemed to augur victory. You, Zoé, I believed, were more impressed by his boots, for you looked up from your work and cried: 'Why it is Puss in Boots!' "

"Did I say 'Puss in Boots'? Poor Émile."

"You said 'Puss in Boots'; and you need not regret it, Zoé. Madame d'Abrantès in her Memoirs relates how a young girl seeing Napoleon, then young and slender, ridiculously accoutred as a Gen-

eral of the Republic, likewise called him 'Puss in Boots.' Bonaparte never forgave her for it. Our friend was very magnanimous; the title did not offend him. Émile Vincent and his company were placed under the command of a general who did not like *francs-tireurs*, and who thus harangued them: 'It is not everything to be dressed for a carnival. You must know how to fight.'

"The caustic speech did not trouble my friend Vincent. He was splendid throughout the campaign. One day he was seen to approach the enemy's outposts with all the calm of a short-sighted man and a hero. He could not see three steps before him. Nothing could make him retreat. For the remaining thirty years of his life, while he was making carpet-brooms, he lived on the memory of that campaign. He read military newspapers, presided over meetings of his former companions in arms, was present at the unveiling of monuments raised to the soldiers of 1870. When from time to time there were erected on French soil monuments to Vercingetorix, to Jeanne d'Arc, to the soldiers of the Loire, at the head of the workmen in his factory, Émile defiled before them. He made patriotic speeches. And, here Zoé, we approach a scene in the comedy of life, the melancholy humour of which may one day be appre-

ciated. During the Dreyfus Affair it occurred to Émile Vincent to say that Esterhazy was a fraud and a traitor. He said it because he knew it was so and because he was far too candid ever to conceal the truth. From that day he was regarded as the enemy of his country and of the army. He was treated as a traitor and an alien. He suffered from heart disease, and his grief at this treatment aggravated the malady. He died of sorrow and of shock. The last time I saw him he was talking of military tactics and strategy. They were his favourite topic of conversation. Although the campaign of '70, in which he had served, was conducted with the greatest disorder and confusion, he was persuaded that the art of war is the finest of all arts. And I fear that I must have vexed him by saying that properly speaking there is no art of war, for the arts that are really employed in campaigns are those of peace; baking, farriery, the maintenance of order, chemistry, etc."

"Why did you say such things, Lucien?" asked Mademoiselle Bergeret.

"Because I was convinced of their truth," replied her brother. "What is called strategy is really the art practised by Cook's agency. It consists in crossing rivers by way of bridges and getting the

other side of mountains through passes. As for military tactics, the rules are childish. Great Captains pay no attention to them. Although they would never admit it, they leave much to chance. Their art is to create prejudices in their favour. Conquest becomes easy to them when they are believed to be unconquerable. It is only on a plan that a battle assumes that aspect of order and regularity which reveals a dominant will."

"Poor Émile Vincent!" sighed Mademoiselle Bergeret. "He was indeed passionately fond of the army. And I agree with you that he must have suffered cruelly when he found military society treating him as an enemy. General Cartier de Chalmot's wife was very hard on him. She knew better than anyone that he subscribed largely to military charities. And yet she would have nothing to do with him when she heard that he had called Esterhazy a fraud and a traitor. She broke with him in the most undisguised fashion. One day when he came to her house, she went close up to the hall where he was waiting and exclaimed so that he might hear her: 'Tell him that I am not at home.' Nevertheless she is not a malicious woman."

"No certainly," replied Monsieur Bergeret.

"She acted according to that holy simplicity of which still better examples may be found in earlier times. Only commonplace virtues are left to us nowadays. And poor Émile died of nothing but grief."

ADRIENNE BUQUET

TO DR. GEORGES DUMAS

ADRIENNE BUQUET

E were finishing our dinner at the tavern when Laboullée said to me:

"I admit that second-sight, hypnotic suggestion from a distance, presentiments subsequently fulfilled, all those phenomena dependent on a condition of the organism at present ill-defined, are not for the most part proved in such a manner as to satisfy the demands of scientific criticism. They nearly all rest on evidence which, though genuine, permits of some uncertainty as to the nature of the phenomena. That the facts about them are vague, I admit. But that they are possible I cannot doubt since I myself have witnessed one. By a happy chance I was myself enabled to make the minutest scrutiny. You may believe me when I tell you that I proceeed methodically and that I was careful to eliminate every possibility of error."

As he uttered this sentence, the young doctor with both hands smote his hollow chest padded with pamphlets and inclined towards me across the table his bald head with its projecting forehead.

"Yes, my good fellow," he added, "by a wonder-

ful stroke of luck one of those phenomena described by Myers and Podmore as 'phantoms of the living' took place in all its phases before the very eyes of a man of science. I observed everything and noted everything down."

"I am listening."

"The time of the occurrence," resumed Labouillée, "was the summer of '91. My friend, Paul Buquet, of whom I have often spoken to you, was then living with his wife in a little flat in the Rue de Grenelle, opposite the fountain. You did not know Buquet?"

"I have seen him two or three times. A big fellow, bearded up to the eyes. His wife was dark, pale, large features with long grey eyes."

"Exactly: a bilious temperament, nervous but fairly well balanced. However, when a woman lives in Paris her nerves get the upper hand and —then the deuce is in it. Did you ever see Adrienne?"

"I met her one evening in the Rue de la Paix, standing with her husband in front of a jeweller's window, her eyes fixed on some sapphires. A good-looking woman and deucedly well dressed for the wife of a poor wretch buried in the cellars of a manufacturing chemist. Buquet was never successful, was he?"

"For five years Buquet had been working for the firm of Jacob, manufacturers of photographic materials and apparatus in the Boulevard Magenta. From day to day he expected to be made a partner. Although he did not earn his thousands, he had a fairly good position. His prospects were not bad. He was a patient, simple fellow and hard working. He was the kind to succeed in the long run. Meanwhile his wife cost him little. Like a true Parisian, she was an excellent manager, for ever making wonderful bargains in linen, frocks, laces and jewels. She astonished her husband by her cleverness in dressing extremely well on nothing at all and Paul was gratified to see her always looking so nice and wearing such elegant underlinen. But these details cannot interest you."

"My dear Laboullée, I am very interested."

"At any rate all this chatter is beside the point. As you know I was Paul Buquet's schoolfellow. We knew each other in the second class at Louis-le-Grand; and we had not lost sight of one another when, at the age of twenty-six, before he had made his position, he married Adrienne for love, and with nothing but what she stood up in, as we say. Our friendship did not cease with his marriage. Rather, Adrienne was kind to me, and I used often to dine with the young couple. As you know, I

am doctor to the actor Laroche; I mix with theatrical folk, who from time to time give me tickets. Adrienne and her husband were very fond of the theatre. When I had a box for the evening I used to go and dine with them and take them afterwards to the Comédie-Française. At dinner time I was always sure to find Buquet, who came home from his factory regularly at half-past six, his wife and their friend Géraud."

"Géraud," I inquired, "Marcel Géraud who was in a bank and who used to wear such beautiful ties?"

"The very same. He was a constant visitor at the house. Being a confirmed bachelor and sociable, he dined there every day. He used to bring lobsters, *pâtés* and all kinds of dainties. He was pleasant, amiable and taciturn. Buquet could not get along without him, and we used to take him to the theatre."

"How old was he?"

"Géraud? I don't know. Between thirty and forty. . . . One day when Laroche had given me a box, I went as usual to the Rue de Grenelle, to my friends, the Buquets. I was rather late, and when I arrived dinner was ready. Paul was complaining of being hungry; but Adrienne could not make up her mind to sit down to table in Géraud's ab-

sence. 'My children,' I cried, 'I have a box in the second row for the Français! They are playing "Denise"!' 'Come,' said Buquet, 'let us have dinner quickly and try not to miss the first act.' The servant put dinner on the table. Adrienne seemed anxious, and it was evident that she turned against every mouthful. Buquet was noisily swallowing vermicelli, catching the threads hanging from his moustache with his tongue. 'Women are extraordinary,' he exclaimed. 'Just fancy, Laboullée, Adrienne is anxious because Géraud has not come to dinner this evening. She imagines all manner of things. Tell her how absurd she is. Géraud may have been detained. He has his business. He is a bachelor; no one has a right to ask him how he spends his time. What surprises me is that he should devote nearly all his evenings to us. It is very good of him. The least we can do is to leave him some liberty. My principle is never to worry about what my friends are doing. But women are different.' Madame Buquet in a trembling voice rejoined: 'I am anxious. I fear something may have happened to Monsieur Géraud.' Meanwhile Buquet was hurrying on the meal. 'Sophie!' he called to the servant, 'bring in the beef, the salad! Sophie! the cheese! the coffee.' I observed that Madame Buquet had eaten nothing. 'Come,' said

her husband, 'go and dress; and don't make us lose the first act. A play by Dumas is very different from an operetta of which all you want is to catch an air or two. Every play of Dumas' is a series of logical deductions, not one of which must be lost. Go, my love; as for me I have only to put on my frock-coat.' She rose, and slowly, as if almost against her will, passed into her room.

"We drank our coffee, her husband and I, smoking our cigarettes. 'That good Géraud,' said Paul, 'I am vexed all the same that he isn't here this evening. He would have been glad to see "Denise." But can you understand Adrienne's worrying over his absence? I have tried in vain to make her understand that the good fellow may have business which he does not confide to us. Who can tell? Why it may be a love affair! She won't understand. Give me a cigarette.' Just as I was handing him my case, we heard proceeding from the next room a long cry of terror followed by a dull bumpish thud, the sound of something falling. 'Adrienne!' cried Buquet. And he rushed into the bedroom. I followed. We found Adrienne lying full length on the floor, motionless, her face white and her eyes turned up. There was no epileptic or kindred symptom, no foam on the lips. The limbs were extended but not rigid. The pulse was rapid

and unequal. I helped her husband to put her into an arm-chair. Almost immediately her circulation was restored; the blood rushed to her face, which was generally of a dull white. 'There,' she said, pointing to her wardrobe mirror, 'there! I saw him there. As I was fastening my bodice, I saw him in the glass. I turned round, thinking he was behind me. But seeing no one I understood and fell.'

"Meanwhile I was trying to ascertain whether she had sustained any injury from her fall and I found none. Buquet was giving her sugared *eau des carmes*. 'Come, my love,' he was saying, 'gather yourself together! Who was it you saw? What do you say?' She turned white again. 'Oh! I saw him, him, Marcel.' 'She saw Géraud! that is odd,' cried Buquet. 'Yes, I saw him,' she resumed gravely: 'he looked at me without speaking, like that.' And she assumed a haggard look. Buquet turned towards me wonderingly. 'Don't be anxious,' I replied, 'such illusions are not serious, they may proceed from indigestion. We will consider the matter at leisure. For the moment we may put it on one side. At La Charité I know a patient suffering from gastric disease who used to see cats under all the furniture.'

"In a few minutes Madame Buquet having com-

pletely recovered, her husband took out his watch and said: 'If you think that the theatre will not do her any harm, Laboullée, it is time we started. I will tell Sophie to go for a cab.' Adrienne quickly put on her hat. 'Paul! Paul! Doctor! do listen: let us go to Monsieur Géraud's first. I am anxious, more anxious than I can tell you.'

" 'You are mad!' cried Buquet. 'Whatever do you imagine is wrong with Géraud? We saw him yesterday in perfect health.'

"She gave me a look so imploring that the burning intensity of it went straight to my heart. 'Laboullée, my friend let us go at once to Monsieur Géraud's.'

"I could not refuse her, she asked so entreatingly. Paul was grumbling: he wanted to see the first act. I said to him: 'We had better go to Géraud's, it will not take us far out of our way.' The cab was waiting for us. I called to the driver: '5 Rue du Louvre. And as quick as you can.'

"Géraud lived at number 5 Rue du Louvre, not far from his bank, in a little three-roomed flat filled with neckties. They were the good fellow's weakness. Barely had we stopped at the door when Buquet leaped from the cab and looking in at the porter's lodge, asked: 'How is Monsieur Géraud?' The *concierge* replied: 'Monsieur Géraud re-

turned at five o'clock and took his letters. He has not gone out since. If you want to see him, it is the back staircase, on the fourth floor, to the right.' But Buquet was already at the cab door, crying: 'Géraud is at home. You see, my love, how absurd you were. To the Comédie-Français, driver.' Then Adrienne almost threw herself out of the cab. 'Paul, I implore you, go up to Géraud's. See him. See him, you must.'

" 'Go up four flights!' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'Adrienne you will make us miss the play. Really, when a woman once gets an idea into her head. . . .'

"I remained alone in the cab with Madame Buquet, and I saw her eyes turned towards the house door and gleaming in the darkness. At length Paul returned: 'Well,' he said, 'I rang three times and without an answer. After all, my love, he must have had his reasons for not wishing to be disturbed. He may be with a woman. There would be nothing astonishing in that.' Adrienne's look became so tragic, that I myself felt anxious. When I came to think of it, it was unnatural for Géraud, who never dined at home, to remain up there from five o'clock in the afternoon until half-past seven. 'Wait here for me,' I said to Monsieur and Madame Buquet, 'I will go and speak to the *con-*

cierge.' The woman also thought it strange that Géraud should not have gone out to dinner as usual. It was she who waited on the fourth-floor tenant, so she had the key of the flat. She took it down from the rack and offered to go up with me. When we had reached the landing, she opened the door, and from the vestibule called three or four times: 'Monsieur Géraud!' Receiving no reply, she ventured to enter the first room which was the bedroom. Again she called: 'Monsieur Géraud! Monsieur Géraud!' No reply. It was quite dark. We had no matches. 'There must be a box of Swedish matches on the *table de nuit,'* the woman said, beginning to tremble and afraid to move. I began to feel on the table and my fingers came in contact with a sticky substance. 'There is no mistake about that,' I thought. 'It is blood.'

"When at length we had lit a candle, we saw Géraud stretched on his bed, with a wound in his head. His arm was hanging down on to the carpet where his revolver had fallen. A letter stained with blood was open on the table. It was in his handwriting and addressed to Monsieur and Madame Buquet. It began thus: 'My dear friends, you have been the charm and joy of my life.' It went on to tell them of his resolve to die without clearly explaining for what reason, but he

hinted that financial embarrassment was the cause of his suicide. I perceived that death had taken place about an hour ago. So that he had killed himself at the very moment when Madame Buquet had seen him in the glass.

"Now is not this just what I was telling you, a perfectly authentic case of second sight, or to use a more exact term, an instance of that curious psychical synchronism which science is studying to-day with a zeal which far surpasses its success."

"It may be something quite different," I replied. "Are you quite sure that there was nothing between Marcel Géraud and Madame Buquet?"

"Why? . . . I never noticed anything. And after all, what would that prove? . . ."

THE INTAGLIO

THE INTAGLIO

HAD come to him at noon by invitation. We lunched in the dining-room long as a church nave, a veritable treasure-house filled with the ancient gold and silver work he has collected. I found him not exactly sad but meditative. His conversation now and again suggested the light and graceful turn of his wit. An occasional word revealed the rare delicacy of his artistic tastes and his passion for sport, by no means allayed by a terrible fall from his horse which had split his head open. But constantly the flow of his ideas was checked as if they had been barred by some obstacle.

From this conversation, which was somewhat fatiguing to follow, all I retain is that he had just sent a couple of white peacocks to his chateau of Raray and that without any special reason he had for three weeks been neglecting his friends, forsaking even the most intimate, Monsieur and Madame N.

It was plain enough to me that he had not asked me to come and listen to confidences such as those.

While we were taking our coffee, I asked him what it was he had to tell me. He looked at me rather surprised:

"Had I anything to tell you?"

"*Dame!* You wrote: 'Come and lunch tomorrow. I want to talk to you.' "

As he was silent I took the letter from my pocket and showed it to him. The address was in his attractive running hand, somewhat irregular. On the envelope there was a seal in violet wax.

He passed his hand over his forehead.

"I remember. Be so kind as to go to Féral's, he will show you a study by Romney; a young woman; golden hair the reflection of which gilds her cheeks and forehead. . . . Pupils dark blue, giving a bluish tinge to the whole eye. . . . The warm freshness of her complexion. . . . It is delicious. And an arm like a gold-beater's skin. However, look at it and see if . . ."

He paused. And with his hand on the door handle:

"Wait for me. I will put on my coat and we will go out together."

Left alone in the dining-room, I went to the window, and, more attentively than before, examined the seal of violet wax. It bore the imprint

of an antique intaglio, representing a satyr raising the veil of a nymph who was asleep at the foot of a pillar, under a laurel-tree. During the best Roman peroid the subject was a favourite one with painters and with engravers of precious stones. This representation appeared to me excellent. The purity of the style, the perfect feeling for form, the harmonious grouping, converted this scene no longer than one's finger-nail, into a composition vast and imposing.

I was under the spell when my friend appeared through the half-open door.

"Come, let's be off," he said.

He had his hat on and seemed to be in a hurry to go out.

I congratulated him on his seal.

"I was not aware that you possessed this beautiful gem."

He replied that he had not had it long, only about six weeks. It was a find. He took it from the finger on which he wore it set in a ring, and put it in my hand.

It is well known that stones engraved in this fine classic style are generally cornelians. I was somewhat surprised therefore to see a dull gem, of a dark violet.

"What!" I cried, "an amethyst."

"Yes, a melancholy stone and unlucky. Do you think it is a genuine antique?"

He called for a magnifying glass. And now I was better able to admire the carving of the intaglio. It was obviously a masterpiece of Greek glyptography dating from the early Empire. Among all the precious stones in the Museum at Naples I had never seen anything more beautiful. With the glass it was possible to distinguish on the pillar an emblem often found on monuments dedicated to some subject of the Bacchic cycle. I pointed it out to him.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. The gem was in an open setting. It occurred to me to examine the reverse; and I was very surprised to find thereon an inscription of a clumsy crudity dating evidently from a period much less remote than that of the intaglio. In a measure these signs resembled the engraving on those Abraxas stones * so familiar to antiquaries. In spite of my inexperience I believed them to be magic signs. That was also my friend's opinion.

"It is thought," he said, "to be a cabalistic formula, imprecations taken from a Greek poet . . ."

* Stones so called because they bore the mystic words Abraxas, Abrasax, known also as Basilidian stones because they were the symbol of the Basilidians, a gnostic sect.

"Which poet?"

"I am not very well up in them."

"Theocritus."

"Theocritus perhaps."

Through the glass I could make out distinctly a group of four letters:

KHPH

"That doesn't spell a name," said my friend.

I pointed out to him that in Greek it is the equivalent of:

KERE

And I gave him back the stone. He looked at it long in a dazed manner and then put it on to his finger.

"Come," he said briskly. "Come."

"Where are you going?"

"Towards the Madeleine. And you?"

"I? Where am I going? *Parbleu!* I am going to Gaulot's to see a horse which he refuses to buy until I have looked at it. For, as you know, I am an authority on horses and something of a veterinary surgeon to boot. I may describe myself also as a furniture broker, an upholsterer, an architect, a gardener, and if need be a stock-jobber. Ah! my friend if only I had the energy I would cut out all the Jews."

We went out into the *faubourg;* and, as we walked my friend assumed a gait very different from his habitual nonchalance. His pace soon became so rapid that I had difficulty in keeping up with him. In front of us was a woman rather well dressed. He called my attention to her.

"Her back is round, and she is heavy of figure. But look at her ankle. I am sure the leg is charming. Have you not noticed that the build of horses, of women, and of all fine animals is very much the same? Coarse and large in the fleshy parts, their limbs become thin towards the joints, where they display the fineness of the bones. Look at that woman; above her waist she is not worth a glance. But her limbs! How free, how powerful! How well balanced the movement of her walk! And how fine the leg just above the ankle! And the thigh I am sure is nervously supple and really beautiful."

Then he added with that acquired wisdom which he was ever ready to communicate:

"You must not ask everything from one woman; you must take beauty where you find it. It is deucedly rare, is beauty!"

Whereupon, through a mysterious association of ideas, he raised his left hand and looked at his intaglio. I said to him:

"Then have you abandoned your little armorial tree and taken as your crest that marvellous Bacchante?"

"Ah! Yes, the beech, the *fau* of Du Fau. In Poitou, under Louis XVI, my great grandfather was what was then called a nobleman, that is he was an ennobled commoner. Later he joined a revolutionary club at Poitiers and acquired national property, which procures for me to-day, in a society of Jews and Americans, the friendship of princes and the rank of an aristocrat. Why did I forsake the *fau* of the Du Fau? Why? It was worth almost as much as the *chêne* * of Duchesne de la Sicotière. And I have exchanged it for a bacchante, a barren laurel and an emblematical stone."

Just as with ironical emphasis he was uttering these words, we reached the house of his friend Gaulot; but Du Fau passed the two copper knockers representing Neptune, gleaming on the door like bath taps.

"I thought you were so eager to go and see Gaulot?"

He appeared not to hear me and quickened his step. He continued breathlessly as far as the Rue Matignon, down which he turned. Then suddenly he stopped in front of a tall, melancholy, five-

* Oak.

storied house. In silence he looked anxiously at the flat stucco façade with its numerous windows.

"Are you going to be there long?" I asked him. "Do you know that Madame Cère lives in this house?"

I knew that name would annoy him. Madame Cère was a woman whose artificial beauty, well-known venality and obvious stupidity he had always detested. Old and of neglected appearance she was suspected of being a shop-lifter and appropriating lace. But in a weak almost plaintive voice, he replied:

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. Look at those windows on the second story and those hideous curtains with red leopards."

He shook his head.

"But certainly Madame Cère lives there. At this very moment she is probably behind one of those red leopards."

He seemed as if he would like to call on her. I expressed my surprise.

"Once you could not tolerate her. That was when every one considered her beautiful and ornamental; when she inspired fatal passion and tragic love you used to say: 'If it were only for the coarseness of her skin the woman would fill me with

insurmountable disgust. But besides she is flat-chested and big-jointed.' Now, when all her charms have faded, have you succeeded in discovering one of those little points of beauty, with which as you were saying just now, we ought to be contented? What do you make of the fineness of her ankle and the nobility of her heart? A tall gawky woman without bust or hips, who, as she entered a salon, cast a sweeping gaze round the room, and by this simple trick attracted a crowd of those vain and imbecile creatures who ruin themselves for women devoid of natural charms."

I paused, rather ashamed of having spoken thus of a woman. But this woman had given such abundant proof of her revolting malice, that I could not resist the feeling of repugnance she inspired. In truth I should not have expressed myself thus, had I not been convinced of her falseness and her evil disposition. Moreover I had the satisfaction of perceiving that Du Fau had not heard a single word of what I had said.

He began to talk as if to himself.

"Whether I call on her or not it is all the same. For six weeks I have visited nowhere without meeting her. Houses, which I have not entered for many years, I now return to, why I know not! Queer houses too!"

Unable to comprehend the lure which drew him, I left him there, standing in front of the open door. That Du Fau, who had loathed Madame Cère when she was beautiful, that he, who had repulsed her advances when she was in her prime, should seek her now that she was old and a victim of drugs, must result from a deterioration which I had not expected in my friend. Such an uncommon vagary I should have declared impossible if in the obscure domain of sensual pathology one could ever be sure of anything.

A month later, I left Paris without an opportunity of again meeting Paul Du Fau. After spending a few days in Brittany, I went to stay with my cousin B—— at Trouville. Her children were there with her. The first week of my visit to the Chalet des Alcyons was spent in giving lessons in water-colours to my nieces, in teaching my nephews to fence and in hearing my cousin play Wagner.

On Sunday morning I went with the family as far as the church, and while they were at mass I wandered about the town. Walking along the beach road lined with toy stalls and curiosity shops, I saw in front of me Madame Cère. Languid, solitary and forlorn, she was going down to the bathing-

huts. The dragging of her feet suggested that her shoes were down at heel. Her frock, torn and crumpled, seemed to be dropping off her body. For one moment she looked round. Her hollow vacant eyes and her hanging lip positively alarmed me. While the women cast sidelong glances at her, she went on her way dismal and indifferent.

Obviously the poor woman was poisoned with morphia. At the end of the street she stopped before the shop window of Madame Guillot, and, with her long thin hand, began to feel the laces. Her eager glance at that moment reminded me of the tattle that circulated about her in the big shops. The stout Madame Guillot, who was showing out some customers, appeared at the door. And Madame Cère, putting down the lace, resumed her dreary walk to the beach.

"You haven't bought anything for a long time! What a bad customer you are!" cried Madame Guillot as she saw me. "Come, look at some buckles and fans which the young ladies, your nieces, thought very pretty. How good looking they grow, the young ladies!"

Then she looked at the disappearing form of Madame Cère and shook her head as if to say:

"Isn't it unfortunate? Eh?"

I had to buy some paste buckles for my nieces.

While my purchase was being wrapped up, through the shop window I saw Du Fau going down to the beach. He was walking very quickly with an anxious air. In the manner of agitated persons, he was biting his nails, which enabled me to observe that he wore the amethyst on his finger.

I was surprised to see him, especially as he said he was going to Dinard. He has a chalet there and harriers. When I fetched my cousin from church, I asked her whether she knew that Du Fau was at Trouville. She nodded. Then, slightly embarrassed:

"Our poor friend is quite absurd. He is tied to that woman. And really . . ."

She paused and then resumed:

"It is he who pursues her. I can't understand it."

Du Fau was indeed pursuing her. In a few days I had certain proof of it. I saw him constantly dogging the steps of Madame Cère and of Monsieur Cère, whom no one knows whether to regard as a stupid or an obliging husband. His dulness saves him and makes it possible to give him the benefit of the doubt. Once this woman was blindly set on attracting Du Fau, who is a useful friend in households ostentatious but not wealthy. But Du Fau made no attempt to conceal his dislike for her.

He used to say in her presence: "An artificially beautiful woman is more detestable than an ugly woman. The latter may offer pleasant surprises. The other is naught but a fruit filled with ashes." On that occasion the strength of Du Fau's feeling imparted to its expression a biblical elevation of style. Now Madame Cère ignored him. Grown indifferent to men, she now cared only for her De Pravaz syringe * and her friend, the Countess V——. These two women were inseparable; and the innocence of their friendship was thought to be rendered possible by the circumstance that they were both moribund. Nevertheless Du Fau was always with them on their excursions. One day I saw him carrying Monsieur Cère's heavy field-glasses slung over his shoulders. He persuaded Madame Cère to go out in a boat with him, and the whole beach fixed its eyes upon them with an unholy glee.

Naturally enough while he was in such an ignominious position I had little desire for his society. And as he was perpetually in a kind of somnambulistic state, I quitted Trouville without having exchanged a dozen words with my unhappy friend, whom I left a prey to the Cères and Countess V——.

* A morphia syringe.

One evening in Paris I met him again. It was at the house of his friends and neighbours, the N——'s, who are charming hosts. In the arrangement of their beautiful house in the Avenue Kléber, I recognized the excellent taste of Madame N—— united to that of Du Fau, and blending very harmoniously together. There were not many present, only a few friends. As in the past, Paul Du Fau displayed that turn of wit peculiar to him, that refined delicacy touched with a flavour of the most picturesque brutality. Madame N—— is intelligent and the conversation in her salon is quite good. Nevertheless when I first entered the talk was extremely commonplace. A magistrate, Monsieur le Conseiller Nicolas, was relating at length that hackneyed tale of the sentry box, wherein every sentinel in turn committed suicide, and which had to be pulled down in order to put a stop to this novel epidemic. After which Madame N—— asked me if I believed in talismans. Monsieur le Conseiller Nicolas relieved my embarrassment by saying that I, being an unbeliever, was bound to be superstitious.

"You are quite right," replied Madame N——. "He believes neither in God nor the devil. And he adores stories of the other world."

I looked at this charming woman while she was speaking; and I admired the unobtrusive grace of her cheeks, her neck and her shoulders. Her whole person gives one the idea of something rare and precious. I do not know what Du Fau thinks of Madame N——'s foot. To me it is beautiful.

Paul Du Fau came and shook hands with me. I noticed that he was no longer wearing his ring.

"What have you done with your amethyst?"

"I have lost it."

"What! An intaglio more beautiful than any in Rome and Naples! You have lost it?"

Without giving him time to reply, N——, who is always at his side, exclaimed:

"Yes, it is a curious story. He has lost his amethyst."

N—— is an excellent fellow, very self-confident, a trifle diffuse, and of a simplicity which sometimes provokes a smile. Noisily he called to his wife:

"Marthe, my love, here is some one who has not yet heard that Du Fau has lost his amethyst."

And turning to me:

"Why, it is quite a story. Would you believe it? Our friend had absolutely forsaken us. I used to say to my wife: 'What have you done to Du Fau?' She would reply: 'What have I done?

Why nothing, my love.' It was incomprehensible. But our astonishment doubled when we heard that he was always with that poor Madame Cère."

Madame N—— interrupted her husband:

"What has that got to do with it?"

But N—— insisted:

"Excuse me, my love! But I must mention it in order to explain the history of the amethyst. Well, this summer our friend Du Fau refused to come with us to the country as he had been in the habit of doing. My wife and I had given him a very hearty invitation. But he remained at Trouville, with his cousin de Maureil, in very dull society."

Madame N—— protested.

"It is true," repeated N——, "very dull society. He spent his time going out in a boat with Madame Cère."

Du Fau calmly observed that there was not one word of truth in what N—— was saying. The latter putting his hand on his friend's shoulder said:

"I defy you to contradict me."

And he finished his story.

"Day and night Du Fau went out with Madame Cère, or with her ghost, for it is said that Madame Cère is nothing but the ghost of her former self. Cère stayed on the beach with his field-glasses.

During one of these excursions Du Fau lost his amethyst. After this mischance he declined to stay a day longer at Trouville. He left the place without bidding anyone farewell, took train and came to us, at Les Eyzies, where we had given up expecting him. It was two o'clock in the morning. 'Here I am,' he said calmly. There's eccentricity for you!"

"And the amethyst?" I asked.

"It is true," replied Du Fau, "that it fell into the sea. It lies buried in the sand. At least no fisherman has in the traditional manner brought it to land in the belly of a fish."

A few days later, I paid one of my customary visits to Hendel in the Rue de Chateaudun. And I inquired whether he had not some curiosity with which to tempt me. He knows that I am so old fashioned as to collect ancient bronzes and marbles. Silently he opened a glass case, reserved for amateurs, and took out a little Egyptian scribe in pietra dura, of primitive workmanship, a veritable treasure! When I heard its price, I myself put it back, not without a longing glance. Then in the case I perceived the imprint in wax of the intaglio I had so much admired at Du Fau's. I recognized the nymph, the pillar, the laurel. It was beyond the possibility of a doubt.

"Did you ever have the gem?" I asked Hendel.

"Yes, I sold it last year."

"A fine gem! Where did you get it?"

"It came from the collection of Mark Delion, the financier, who five years ago committed suicide on account of a society lady. . . . Madame . . . perhaps you know her . . . Madame Cère."

LA SIGNORA CHIARA

TO UGO OJETTI

LA SIGNORA CHIARA

ROFESSOR GIACOMO TEDESCHI of Naples is a doctor well known in the town. His house, which is decidedly odoriferous, is near the Incoronata. It is frequented by all kinds of persons, and particularly by the beautiful maidens who at Santa Lucia traffic in the harvest of the sea. He sells drugs for all maladies; he is not above extracting a decayed tooth; he is an adept, the day after a festival, at sewing up the gaping skin of a bravo; and he knows how to use the longshore dialect interpersed with academical Latin so as to impart confidence to his patients laid out on the longest, the most rickety, the most creaking and the dirtiest operating-chair to be found in any seaport in the universe. He is a man of slender build, of full face, with little green eyes and a long nose overhanging a thin-lipped mouth; his round shoulders, his pot belly and his thin legs recall the pantaloon of bygone times.

Late in life Giacomo married the young Chiara Mammi, daughter of an old convict highly esteemed in Naples, who, having become a baker on the

Borgo di Santo, died lamented by the whole town. Ripened by the sun which gilds the grapes of Torre and the oranges of Sorrento, the beauty of Chiara blossomed in glowing splendour.

Professor Giacomo Tedeschi held the fitting belief that his wife was as virtuous as she was beautiful. Moreover he knew how strong is the sentiment of feminine honour in a bandit's family. But he was a doctor and aware of the disturbances and weaknesses to which the nature of woman is liable. He felt some anxiety when Ascanio Ranieri of Milan, who had set up as ladies' tailor on the Piazza dei Martiri, took to visiting his house. Ascanio was young, handsome and always smiling. The daughter of the heroic Mammi, the patriot baker, was certainly too good a Neapolitan to forget her duty with a townsman of Milan. Nevertheless Ascanio showed a preference for visiting the house near the Incoronata during the doctor's absence, and the signora willingly received him unchaperoned.

One day when the Professor came home earlier than he was expected, he surprised Ascanio on his knees to Chiara. While the signora departed with the measured step of a goddess, Ascanio rose to his feet.

Giacomo Tedeschi approached him with every sign of the most anxious solicitude.

"My friend, I see that you are ill. You did well to come to see me. I am a doctor and vowed to the relief of human suffering. You are in pain, do not deny it. Your face is aflame. It is headache, an acute headache, doubtless. How wise of you to come to see me. You were waiting for me impatiently, I am sure. Yes, a terrible headache." While uttering these words, the old man, strong as a Sabine bull, was pushing Ascanio into his consulting-room and forcing him to recline in that famous operating-chair, which for forty years had borne the weight of suffering Neapolitans.

Then holding him inexorably there:

"I see what it is, your tooth is aching. That's it! Yes, your toothache is very bad."

He took from a case an enormous dentist's forceps, prised open his capacious mouth and with a turn of the forceps pulled out a tooth.

Ascanio fled, spitting blood from his streaming jaw, and Professor Giacomo Tedeschi shrieked after him with savage joy:

"A fine tooth! a fine, a very fine tooth! . . ."

UPRIGHT JUDGES

TO MADAME MARCELLE TINAYRE

UPRIGHT JUDGES

PRIGHT judges I have indeed seen," said Jean Marteau. "It was in a picture. I had gone to Belgium to escape from an inquisitive magistrate, who insisted that I had conspired with anarchists. I did not know my accomplices and my accomplices did not know me. But that presented no difficulty to the magistrate. Nothing embarrassed him. Though he was perpetually weighing evidence his sense of values remained undeveloped. His persistence terrified me. I went to Belgium and stopped at Antwerp, where I became a grocer's assistant. In the picture gallery one Sunday I saw two upright judges in a painting by Mabuse. They are of a type now extinct. I mean the type of peripatetic judges who used to travel at a jog-trot on their ambling nags. Foot soldiers, armed with lances and partisans form their escort. Bearded and hairy, these two judges, like the kings in old Flemish Bibles, wear an eccentric yet magnificent headdress suggestive at once of a nightcap and a diadem. Their brocaded robes are richly adorned. The old master has succeeded in

imparting to them a grave, calm and gentle air. Their horses are as mild and calm as they. Nevertheless these two judges differed both in character and in point of view. You can see that at once. One holds a paper in his hand and with his finger points to the text. The other, his left hand on the pommel of his saddle, is raising his right with more benevolence than authority. Between thumb and forefinger he appears to be holding an impalpable powder. And the hand thus carefully posed for this gesture suggests an intellect cautious and subtle. They are upright both of them, but obviously the first adheres to the letter, the second to the spirit. Leaning against the rail which separates them from the public, I listened to their talk. Said the first judge:

" 'I hold to the written word. The first law was written on stone as a sign that it would last as long as the world.'

"The other judge made answer:

" 'Every law is out of date as soon as it is written. For the hand of the scribe is slow, the mind of man is nimble and his destiny is uncertain.'

"Then these two excellent old men pursued their sententious discussion:

First judge. The law is stable.

Second judge. The law is never fixed.

First judge. Coming forth from God it is immutable.

Second judge. Proceeding naturally from society it is dependent upon the changing conditions of this life.

First judge. It is the will of God, which changeth not.

Second judge. It is the will of man which changeth ever.

First judge. It was before man and is superior to him.

Second judge. It is of man, infirm as he, and like unto him capable of perfection.

First judge. Judge, open thy book and read what is written therein. For it is God who dictated to such as believed in Him: *Sic locutus est patribus nostris, Abraham et semini ejus in sæcula.*

Second judge. That which is written by the dead will be erased by the living. Were it not so, the will of those who have passed away would impose itself upon those who yet survive; and the dead would be the living and the living the dead.

First judge. To laws prescribed by the dead the living owe obedience. The quick and the dead are contemporary before God. Moses and Cyrus, Cæsar, Justinian and the Emperor of Al-

maine yet reign over us. For in the sight of the Eternal One we are their contemporaries.

Second judge. The living owe obedience to the laws prescribed by the living. For our instruction in that which is permitted and that which is forbidden Zoroaster and Numa Pompilius rank below the cobbler of Saint Gudule.

First judge. The first laws were revealed to us by the Infinite Wisdom. The best laws are those which are nearest to that source.

Second judge. Do you not see that every day new laws are made and that Constitutions and codes differ according to time and place?

First judge. New laws proceed from those that are ancient. They are young branches of the same tree nourished by the same sap.

Second judge. From the ancient tree of the law there is distilled a bitter juice. Ceaselessly is the axe laid unto that tree.

First judge. It is not for the judge to inquire whether the laws are just, since they must necessarily be so. He has only to administer them justly.

Second judge. It is for us to inquire whether the law that we administer be just or unjust, because if we discover it to be unjust, it is possible for us to introduce some modification into the application we are forced to make of it.

First judge. The criticism of laws is not compatible with the respect we owe to them.

Second judge. If we do not recognize the severity of the law how can we temper it?

First judge. We are judges, not legislators or philosophers.

Second judge. We are men.

First judge. A man is incapable of judging men. A judge, when he goes to the seat of justice, puts off his humanity. He assumes divinity and no longer tastes either joy or sorrow.

Second judge. When justice is not dispensed with sympathy it becomes the cruellest injustice.

First judge. Justice is perfect when it is literal.

Second judge. When justice is not spiritual it is absurd.

First judge. The principle of laws is divine and the consequences which flow from them are no less divine. But even if law were not wholly of God, if it were wholly of man, it would still be necessary to administer it according to the letter. For the letter is fixed, the spirit is fleeting.

Second judge. Law is wholly of man. It was born foolish and cruel in the early glimmerings of human reason. But were it of divine essence, it should be followed according to the spirit not ac-

cording to the letter, for the letter is dead and the spirit is living.

"Having thus conversed, the two upright judges dismounted and with their escort approached the Tribunal, whither they must go, in order to render unto each man his due. Their horses, tied to a stake, under a great elm, conversed together. The first judge's horse spoke first:

" 'When horses inherit the earth,' he said (and the earth will doubtless belong to them one day, for the horse is obviously the ultimate end and the final object of creation), 'when the earth is the horse's and we are free to act as we will, we will live under laws like men and we will take delight in imprisoning, hanging and breaking on the wheel our fellow creatures. We will be moral beings. It shall be proved by the prisons, the gibbets and the strappados which shall be erected in our towns. There shall be legislative horses. What do you think Roussin?'

"Roussin, who was the second judge's steed, replied that in his opinion the horse was the king of creation and he confidently hoped that sooner or later his kingdom would come.

" 'And when we have built towns, Blanchet,' he added, 'we must, as you say, establish a system of police in them. In those days I would have the

laws of horses equine, that is favourable to horses and for the equine weal.'

" 'What do you mean by that, Roussin?' asked Blanchet.

" 'My meaning is the natural one. I demand that the law shall secure for each his share of corn and his place in the stable, and that each be permitted to love as he will during the season. For there is a time for everything. In short I would have the laws of horses in conformity with nature.'

" 'I hope,' replied Blanchet, 'that the ideas of our legislators will be more elevated than yours, Blanchet. They will make laws according as they are inspired by that celestial horse who has created all horses. He is all good since he is all powerful. Power and goodness are his attributes. He foreordained his creatures to endure the bit, to drag at the halter, to feel the spur and to die beneath the whip. You talk of love, comrade; he ordained that many of us should be made geldings. It is his command. The laws must maintain this worshipful behest.'

" 'But are you quite sure, my friend,' inquired Roussin, 'that these evils proceed from the celestial horse that has created us, and not merely from man his inferior creation?'

" 'Men are the ministers and the angels of the

celestial horse,' replied Blanchet. 'His will is manifest in everything that happens. His will is good. Since he wishes us ill, it must be that ill is good. If therefore the law is to do us good it must make us suffer. And in the Empire of horses we shall be constrained and tortured in every way, by means of edicts, decrees, sentences, judgments and ordinances in order to please the heavenly horse.

" 'Roussin,' added Blanchet, 'you must have the head of an ass not to understand that the horse was brought into the world to suffer, and that if he does not suffer he fails to fulfil his destiny and that from happy horses the heavenly horse turns away his face.' "

THE OCEAN CHRIST

TO IVAN STRANNIK

THE OCEAN CHRIST

THAT year many of the fishers of Saint-Valéry had been drowned at sea. Their bodies were found on the beach cast up by the waves with the wreckage of their boats; and for nine days, up the steep road leading to the church were to be seen coffins borne by hand and followed by widows, who were weeping beneath their great black-hooded cloaks, like women in the Bible.

Thus were the skipper Jean Lenoël and his son Désiré laid in the great nave, beneath the vaulted roof from which they had once hung a ship in full rigging as an offering to Our Lady. They were righteous men and God-fearing. Monsieur Guillaume Truphème, priest of Saint-Valéry, having pronounced the Absolution, said in a tearful voice:

"Never were laid in consecrated ground there to await the judgment of God better men and better Christians than Jean Lenoël and his son Désiré."

And while barques and their skippers perished near the coast, in the high seas great vessels foundered. Not a day passed that the ocean did not

bring in some flotsam of wreck. Now one morning some children who were steering a boat saw a figure lying on the sea. It was a figure of Jesus Christ, life-size, carved in wood, painted in natural colouring, and looking as if it were very old. The Good Lord was floating upon the sea with arms outstretched. The children towed the figure ashore and brought it up into Saint-Valéry. The head was encircled with the crown of thorns. The feet and hands were pierced. But the nails were missing as well as the cross. The arms were still outstretched ready for sacrifice and blessing, just as He appeared to Joseph of Arimathea and the holy women when they were burying him.

The children gave it to Monsieur le Curé Truphème, who said to them:

"This image of the Saviour is of ancient workmanship. He who made it must have died long ago. Although to-day in the shops of Amiens and Paris excellent statues are sold for a hundred francs and more, we must admit that the earlier sculptors were not without merit. But what delights me most is the thought that if Jesus Christ be thus come with open arms to Saint-Valéry, it is in order to bless the parish, which has been so cruelly tried, and in order to announce that he has compassion on the poor folk who go a-fishing at the risk of

their lives. He is the God who walked upon the sea and blessed the nets of Cephas."

And Monsieur le Curé Truphème, having had the Christ placed in the church on the cloth of the high altar, went off to order from the carpenter Lemerre a beautiful cross in heart of oak.

When it was made, the Saviour was nailed to it with brand new nails, and it was erected in the nave above the churchwarden's pew.

Then it was noticed that His eyes were filled with mercy and seemed to glisten with tears of heavenly pity.

One of the churchwardens, who was present at the putting up of the crucifix, fancied he saw tears streaming down the divine face. The next morning when Monsieur le Curé with a choir-boy entered the church to say his mass, he was astonished to find the cross above the churchwarden's pew empty and the Christ lying upon the altar.

As soon as he had celebrated the divine sacrifice he had the carpenter called and asked him why he had taken the Christ down from his cross. But the carpenter replied that he had not touched it. Then, after having questioned the beadle and the sidesmen, Monsieur Truphème made certain that no one had entered the church since the crucifix had been placed over the churchwarden's pew.

Thereupon he felt that these things were miraculous, and he meditated upon them discreetly. The following Sunday in his exhortation he spoke of them to his parishioners, and he called upon them to contribute by their gifts to the erection of a new cross more beautiful than the first and more worthy to bear the Redeemer of the world.

The poor fishers of Saint-Valéry gave as much money as they could and the widows brought their wedding-rings. Wherefore Monsieur Truphème was able to go at once to Abbeville and to order a cross of ebony highly polished and surmounted by a scroll with the inscription I.N.R.I. in letters of gold. Two months later it was erected in the place of the former and the Christ was nailed to it between the lance and the sponge.

But Jesus left this cross as He had left the other; and as soon as night fell He went and stretched Himself upon the altar.

Monsieur le Curé, when he found Him there in the morning, fell on his knees and prayed for a long while. The fame of this miracle spread throughout the neighbourhood, and the ladies of Amiens made a collection for the Christ of Saint-Valéry. Monsieur Truphème received money and jewels from Paris, and the wife of the Minister

of Marine, Madame Hyde de Neuville, sent him a heart of diamonds. Of all these treasures, in the space of two years, a goldsmith of La Rue St. Sulpice, fashioned a cross of gold and precious stones which was set up with great pomp in the church of Saint-Valéry on the second Sunday after Easter in the year 18—. But He who had not refused the cross of sorrow, fled from this cross of gold and again stretched Himself upon the white linen of the altar.

For fear of offending Him He was left there this time; and He had lain upon the altar for more than two years, when Pierre, son of Pierre Caillou, came to tell Monsieur le Curé Truphème that he had found the true cross of Our Lord on the beach.

Pierre was an innocent; and, because he had not sense enough to earn a livelihood, people gave him bread out of charity; he was liked because he never did any harm. But he wandered in his talk and no one listened to him.

Nevertheless Monsieur Truphème, who had never ceased meditating on the Ocean Christ, was struck by what the poor imbecile had just said. With the beadle and two sidesmen he went to the spot, where the child said he had seen a cross, and

there he found two planks studded with nails, which had long been washed by the sea and which did indeed form a cross.

They were the remains of some old shipwreck. On one of these boards could still be read two letters painted in black, a J and an L; and there was no doubt that this was a fragment of Jean Lenoël's barque, he who with his son Désiré had been lost at sea five years before.

At the sight of this, the beadle and the sidesmen began to laugh at the innocent who had taken the broken planks of a boat for the cross of Jesus Christ. But Monsieur le Curé Truphème checked their merriment. He had meditated much and prayed long since the Ocean Christ had arrived among the fisherfolk, and the mystery of infinite charity began to dawn upon him. He knelt down upon the sand, repeated the prayer for the faithful departed, and then told the beadle and the sidesmen to carry the flotsam on their shoulders and to place it in the church. When this had been done he raised the Christ from the altar, placed it on the planks of the boat and himself nailed it to them, with the nails that the ocean had corroded.

By the priest's command, the very next day this cross took the place of the cross of gold and precious stones over the churchwarden's pew. The

Ocean Christ has never left it. He has chosen to remain nailed to the planks on which men died invoking His name and that of His Mother. There, with parted lips, august and afflicted He seems to say:

"My cross is made of all men's woes, for I am in truth the God of the poor and the heavy-laden."

JEAN MARTEAU

JEAN MARTEAU

I

A DREAM

HE talk fell on sleep and dreams.

Jean Marteau said that one dream had left an indelible impression on his mind.

"Was it a prophetic dream?" inquired Monsieur Goubin.

"In itself," replied Jean Marteau, "the dream was not remarkable, not even for its incoherence. But its images presented themselves with a painful vividness which is quite unique. Nothing I ever experienced, nothing, was ever so real to me, so actual as the visions of this dream. In that lies its interest. It enabled me to understand the illusions of a mystic. Had I been less rational I should certainly have taken it to be an apocalypse and a revelation, and I should have derived therefrom principles of conduct and a rule of life. I ought to tell you that I dreamed this dream under peculiar circumstances. It was in the spring of 1895; I was twenty. Having recently arrived in Paris I

was in difficulties. That night I had lain down in a copse of the Versailles wood. I had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. I suffered no pain. I was in a state of calm and ease, disturbed occasionally by a feeling of anxiety. It seemed to me as if I was neither asleep nor awake. A little girl, quite a little girl in a blue-hooded cape, and a white apron, was walking with crutches over a plain. With every step she took her crutches grew and raised her like stilts. They soon became higher than the poplars on the river's bank. A woman who *saw* my surprise said to me: 'Don't you know that in the spring crutches grow? But there are times when the size increases with alarming rapidity.'

"A man whose face I could not see, added: 'It is the climacteric hour.'

"Then with a soft and mysterious sound which alarmed me, all around me the grass began to grow. I arose and reached a plain covered with wan plants, cottony and dead. There I met Vernaux, who was my only friend in Paris, where he lived as penuriously as I. Long we walked side by side in silence. In the sky the stars, huge and rayless, were like discs of pale gold.

"I knew the cause of this appearance and I ex-

plained it to Vernaux: 'It is an optical phenomenon,' I said, 'our eyes are out of focus.'

"And with infinite care and minuteness I engaged in a demonstration which chiefly turned upon the exact correspondence between the human eye and the astronomical telescope. While I was reasoning thus, Vernaux found on the ground some leaden-coloured grass, an enormous black hat, boat shaped, with a brim, a band of gold braid and a diamond buckle. Putting it on his head, he said: 'It is the lord mayor's hat.' 'Obviously,' I replied, and I resumed my demonstration. So arduous was it that the perspiration dropped from my forehead. I was always losing the thread and beginning again vaguely with the phrase: 'The great saurians who swam in the tepid waters of the primitive ocean had eyes constructed like a telescope. . . .'

"I continued until I perceived that Vernaux had disappeared. It was not long before I found him again in a hollow. He was on a spit, roasting over a brushwood fire. Indians with their hair tied on the tops of their heads were basting him with a long-handled spoon and were turning the spit. In a clear voice Vernaux said to me: 'Mélanie has been here.'

"Then only did I perceive that he had the head

and neck of a chicken. But all I could think of was how to find Mélanie, who, by a sudden inspiration I knew to be the most beautiful of women. I ran, and, having reached the edge of a wood, by the moonlight I saw a white form fleeting before me. Hair of a glorious red fell over her neck. A silver light caressed her shoulders, a blue shadow filled the hollow in the middle of her gleaming back; and, as she ran, her dimples in their rise and fall seemed to smile with a divine smile. I distinctly saw the azure shadow on her leg augment or diminish according to the motion of the limb. I noticed also the pink soles of her feet. Long did I pursue her without fatigue and with a step light as the flight of a bird. But a dark shadow veiled her, and her perpetual flight led me into a path so narrow that it was blocked completely by a little iron stove. It was one of those stoves with long bent pipes which are used in studios. It was at a white heat. The door was incandescent and all around the metal was red hot. A cat with its hair all shorn was sitting on it and looking at me. As I drew near I perceived through the cracks in its scorched skin an ardent mass of liquid metal which filled its body. It was miauling, and I understood that it was asking for water. In order to find some, I descended the slope on which was a cool wood of birch and

ash trees. A stream ran through it at the bottom of a ravine. But I could not approach it on account of the blocks of sandstone and tufts of dwarf oaks by which it was overhung. As I slipped on a mossy stone my left arm came away from my shoulder without causing a wound or any pain. I took it in my right hand; it was cold and numb; its touch made me shudder. I reflected that now I was in danger of losing it and how wearisome a drudgery it would be for the rest of my life to have to watch ceaselessly over it. I resolved to order an ebony box wherein I might keep it when it was not in use. As it was very cold in this damp hollow I quitted it by a rustic path which led me on to a wind-swept plateau, where all the trees were bent as if in sorrow. There along a yellow road a procession was passing. It was countrified and humble, just like the Rogation procession in the village of Brécé, which our Master, Monsieur Bergeret, knows so well. There was nothing singular about the clergy, the confraternities, or the faithful except that no one had any feet and that they all moved upon little wheels. Under the canopy I recognized Monsieur l'Abbé Lantaigne, who had become village priest and was weeping tears of blood. I wanted to call out to him: 'I am *ministre plenipotentiaire.*' But my voice choked in my throat, and a great

shadow coming down upon me caused me to raise my head. It was one of the little lame girl's crutches. They had now ascended into the sky some thousand metres and I perceived the child like a little black spot against the moon. The stars had grown still larger and paler, and among them I distinguished three planets, the spherical form of which was quite visible to the eye. I even thought I could recognize spots on their surface. But these spots did not correspond to the drawings of those on Mars, Jupiter and Saturn which I had once seen in astronomical books.

"My friend Vernaux having come up, I asked him whether he could not see the canals on the planet Mars. 'The Ministry is defeated,' he said.

"He bore no sign of the spit I had seen transfixing him, but he still had a chicken's head and neck, and he was dripping with gravy. I felt an uncontrollable desire to demonstrate my optical theory to him and to resume my argument where I had left it. 'The great saurians,' I said, 'which swam in the tepid waters of the primitive ocean had eyes constructed like a telescope. . . .'

"Instead of listening to me, he went up to a reading-desk, which was there in the field, opened an anti-phonary and began to crow like a cock.

"Out of all patience, I turned my back on him

and jumped into a tram that was passing. Inside I found a vast dining-hall, like those in great hotels or on board Atlantic liners. It was all flowers and glass. As far as one could see there were seated at table women in low frocks and men in evening dress in front of candelabra and crystal chandeliers forming an infinite vista of light. A steward came round with meat to which I helped myself. But it emitted a disgusting odour and it made me feel sick before I tasted it. Besides *I was not hungry*. The diners left the table before I had swallowed a mouthful. While the servants were taking away the candles Vernaux came up to me and said: 'You did not notice the lady in the low-necked dress who was sitting next you. It was Mélanie. Look.'

"And through the door he pointed to shoulders flooded with a white light, out in the darkness under the trees. I leapt out, I rushed in pursuit of the charming form. This time I caught it up, I touched it. For one moment I felt a delicious throbbing beneath my fingers. But she slipped from my arms and I was embracing briars.

"That was my dream."

"Truly your dream was sad," said Monsieur Bergeret, "to quote the simple Stratonice:

" 'A vision of oneself may arouse no little disgust.' "

II

THE LAW IS DEAD BUT THE JUDGE IS LIVING

FEW days later," said Jean Marteau, "I happened to be lying in a thicket of the Bois de Vincennes. I had eaten nothing for thirty-six hours."

Monsieur Goubin wiped his eyeglasses. His eyes were kind but his glance was keen. He looked hard at Jean Marteau and said to him reproachfully:

"What? Again you had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours?"

"Again," replied Jean Marteau, "I had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. But I was wrong. One ought not to go without food. It is not right. Hunger should be a crime like vagrancy. But as a matter of fact the two offences are regarded as one and the same; article 269 inflicts from three to six months' imprisonment on those who lack means of subsistence. Vagrancy, according to the code, is the condition of vagrants, of vagabonds, persons without any fixed dwelling or means of sub-

sistence, who exercise no specific trade or profession. They are great criminals."

"It is curious," said Monsieur Bergeret, "that the state of vagrancy, punishable by six months' imprisonment and ten years' police supervision, is precisely the same as that in which the good St. Francis placed his companions at St. Mary of the Angels and the daughters of St. Clare. If St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua came to preach in Paris to-day they would run great risk of being clapped into the prison van and carried off to the police court. Not that I mean to denounce to the authorities the mendicant monks who now swarm among us. They possess means of livelihood; they exercise all manner of trades."

"They are respectable because they are rich," said Jean Marteau. "It is only the poor who are forbidden to beg. Had I been discovered beneath my tree I should have been thrown into prison and that would have been justice. Possessing nothing, I was assumed to be the enemy of property; and it is just to defend property against its enemies. The august task of the judge is to assure to every man that which belongs to him, to the rich his wealth, to the poor his poverty."

"I have reflected on the philosophy of law," said Monsieur Bergeret, "and I have perceived that the

whole structure of social justice rests upon two axioms: robbery is to be condemned: the result of robbery is to be respected. These are the principles which assure the security of individuals and maintain order in the State. If one of these tutelary principles were to be disregarded the whole of society would fall to pieces. They were established in the beginning of time. A chief clothed in bearskin, armed with an axe of flint and with a sword of bronze, returned with his comrades to the stone entrenchments, wherein were enclosed the children of the tribe and the troops of women and of reindeer. They brought back with them youths and maidens from the neighbouring tribe and stones fallen from the sky, which were precious because out of them could be made swords which would not bend. The chief ascended a hillock in the middle of the enclosure and said: 'These slaves and this iron, which I have taken from men weak and contemptible are mine. Whosoever shall lay hands upon them shall be struck down by my axe.' Such is the origin of law. Its spirit is ancient and barbarous. And it is because justice is the ratification of all injustice that it reassures every one.

"A judge may be benevolent, for men are not all bad; the law cannot be benevolent because it is anterior to all ideas of benevolence. The changes

which have been introduced into it down the ages have not altered its original character. Jurists have rendered it subtle, but they have left it barbaric. Its very ferocity causes it to be respected and regarded as august. Men are given to worship malevolent gods, and that which is not cruel seems to them not worth their adoration. The judged believe in the justice of laws. Their morality is that of the judges; both one and the other believe that a punished action is penal. In the police court or at the assizes I have often been touched to see how the accused and the judge agree perfectly in their ideas of good and evil. They have the same prejudices and a common morality."

"It cannot be otherwise," said Jean Marteau. "A poor creature who has stolen from a shop window a sausage or a pair of shoes has not on that account looked deeply and boldly into the very origin of law and the foundation of justice. And those who like ourselves are not afraid to behold in the origin of Codes a sanction of violence and iniquity, are incapable of stealing a halfpenny."

"But after all," said Monsieur Goubin, "there are just laws."

"Do you think so?" inquired Jean Marteau.

"Monsieur Goubin is right," said Monsieur Ber-

geret. "There are just laws. But law having been instituted for the defence of society, in its spirit cannot be more equitable than that society. As long as society is founded upon injustice the function of laws will be to defend and maintain that injustice. And the more unjust they are the worthier of respect they will appear. Notice also that, ancient as most of them are, they do not exactly represent present unrighteousness but past unrighteousnesses which is ruder and crasser. They are monuments of the Dark Ages which have lingered on into brighter days."

"But they are being improved," said Monsieur Goubin.

"They are being improved," said Monsieur Bergeret. "The Chamber and the Senate work at them when they have nothing else to do. But the heart of them remains; and it is bitter. To be frank, I should not greatly fear bad laws if they were administered by good judges. The law is unbending, it is said, I do not believe it. There is no text which may not receive various interpretations. The law is dead. The magistrate is living: he possesses this great advantage over the law. Unfortunately he seldom uses it. Generally he schools himself to be colder, more insensible, more dead than the code he applies. He is not human;

he knows no pity. In him the caste spirit stifles all human sympathy."

"I am only speaking now of honest judges."

"They are in the majority," said Monsieur Goubin.

"They are in the majority," replied Monsieur Bergeret, "if we refer to common honesty and every-day morals. But is an approach to common honesty sufficient equipment for a man who, without falling into error or abuse has to wield the enormous power of punishing? A good judge should possess at once a kind heart and a philosophic mind. That is much to ask from a man who has his way to make and is determined to win advancement in his profession. Leaving out of account the fact that if he displays a morality superior to that of his day he will be hated by his fellows and will arouse universal indignation. For we condemn as immoral all morality which is not our own. All who have introduced any novel goodness into the world have met with the scorn of honest folk. That is what happened to President Magnaud.

"I have his judgments here, collected in a little volume with commentaries by Henri Leyret. When these judgments were pronounced they provoked the indignation of austere magistrates and virtuous legislators. They are stamped with noble

thoughts and tender kindness. They are full of pity, they are human, they are virtuous. In the Law Courts President Magnaud was thought not to have a judicial mind, and the friends of Monsieur Méline accused him of lacking respect for property. And it is true that the considerations on which the judgments of President Magnaud repose are singular, for at every line one meets the thoughts of an independent mind and the sentiments of a generous heart."

Taking from the table a little crimson volume, Monsieur Bergeret turned over the pages and read:

"Honesty and delicacy are two virtues infinitely easier to practise when one lacks nothing than when one is destitute of everything."

"That which cannot be avoided ought not to be punished."

"In order to judge equitably the crime of the poor the judge should for the moment forget his own well-being, in order as far as possible to place himself in the sad situation of a being whom every one has deserted."

"In his interpretation of the law the judge should not merely bear in mind the special case which is

submitted to him, he should take into consideration the wider consequences for good or for evil which his sentence may involve."

"It is the workman alone who produces and who risks his health or his life for the exclusive profit of his master, who endangers nothing but his capital."

"I have quoted almost haphazard," added Monsieur Bergeret, closing the book. "These are novel words. They are the echo of a great soul."

MONSIEUR THOMAS

MONSIEUR THOMAS

I ONCE knew an austere judge. His name was Thomas de Maulan. He was a country gentleman. During the seven years ministry of Marshal MacMahon he had become a magistrate in the hope that one day he would administer justice in the king's name. He had principles which he believed to be unalterable, having never attempted to examine them. As soon as one examines a principle one discovers something beneath it and perceives that it was not a principle at all. Both his religious and his social principles Thomas de Maulan kept outside the range of his curiosity.

He was judge in the court of first instance in the little town of X——, where I was then living. His appearance inspired esteem and even a certain sympathy. His figure was tall, thin, and bony, his face was sallow. His extreme simplicity gave him a somewhat distinguished air. He liked to be called Monsieur Thomas, not that he despised his social position, but because he considered himself too poor to support it. I knew enough of him to

recognize that his appearance was not deceptive and that though weak in character and narrow in intelligence he had a noble soul. I discovered that he possessed high moral qualities. But, having had occasion to observe him in the fulfilment of his functions as examining magistrate and judge, I perceived that his very uprightness and his conception of duty rendered him cruel and sometimes completely deprived him of insight. His extreme piety caused him to be unconsciously obsessed by the ideas of sin and expiation, of crime and punishment; and it was obvious that in punishing criminals he experienced the agreeable sensation of purifying them. Human justice he regarded as a faint yet beautiful reflection of divine justice. In childhood he had been taught that suffering is good, that it is a merit in itself, a virtue, an expiation. This he believed firmly; and he held that suffering is the due of whomsoever has sinned. He loved to chastise. His punishments were the outcome of his kindness of his heart. Accustomed to give thanks to the God who, for his eternal salvation, afflicted him with toothache and colic as a punishment for Adam's sin, he sentenced vagrants and vagabonds to imprisonment and reparation as one who bestows benefits. His legal philosophy was founded upon his catechism; his pitilessness proceeded from his di-

rectness and simplicity of mind. One could not call him cruel. But not being sensual neither was he sensitive. He had no precise physical idea of human suffering. His conception of it was purely moral and dogmatic. There was something mystic in his preference for the system of solitary confinement, and it was not without a certain joyfulness of heart and eye that one day he showed me over a fine prison which had recently been built in his district: a white thing, clean, silent, terrible; cells arranged in a circle, and the warder in the centre in an observation chamber. It looked like a laboratory constructed by lunatics for the manufacture of lunatics. And malevolent lunatics indeed are those inventors of the solitary system who in order to convert a wrongdoer into a moral being subject him to a régime which turns him into an imbecile or a savage. That was not the opinion of Monsieur Thomas. He gazed with silent satisfaction on those atrocious cells. At the back of his mind was the idea that the prisoner is never alone since God is with him. And his calm, self-satisfied glance seemed to say: "Here I have brought five or six persons face to face with their Creator and Sovereign Judge. There is no more enviable fate in the world."

It fell to this magistrate's lot to conduct the in-

quiry in several cases, among others in that of a teacher. Lay and clerical education were then at open war. The republicans having denounced the ignorance and brutality of the priests, the clerical newspaper of the district accused a lay teacher of having made a child sit on a red-hot stove. Among the country aristocracy this accusation found credence. Revolting details were related and the common gossip aroused the attention of justice. Monsieur Thomas, who was an honest man, would never have listened to his passions, had he known them to be passions. But he regarded them as duties because they were religious. He believed it to be his duty to consider complaints urged against a godless school, and he failed to perceive his extreme eagerness to consider them. I must not omit to say that he conducted the inquiry with meticulous care and infinite trouble. He conducted it according to the ordinary methods of justice, and he obtained wonderful results. Thirty school children, persistently interrogated, replied at first badly, afterwards better, and finally very well. After a month's examination, they replied so well that they all gave the same answer. The thirty depositions agreed, they were identical, literally identical, and these children who on the first day said they had seen nothing, now declared with one unfaltering voice, employing ex-

actly the same words, that their little schoolfellow had been seated bare-skinned, on a red-hot stove. Monsieur le Juge Thomas was congratulating himself on so satisfactory a result, when the teacher proved irrefutably that there had never been a stove in the school. Then Monsieur Thomas began to suspect that the children were lying. But what he never perceived was that he himself had unwittingly dictated their evidence and taught it to them by heart.

The prosecution was nonsuited. The teacher was dismissed from the court after having been severely reprimanded by the judge, who strongly urged him in the future to restrain his brutal instincts. Outside his deserted school the priest's scholars made a hullaballoo. And when he went out he was greeted with cries of "Ha! ha! *Grille-Cul* (Roast-back)"; and stones were thrown at him. The Inspector of Primary Schools being informed of the state of affairs, drew up a report stating that this teacher had no authority over his pupils and concluding that his immediate transference to another school would be advisable. He was sent to a village where a dialect was spoken which he did not understand. Even there he was called *Grille-Cul.* It was the only French term that was known there.

During my intercourse with Monsieur Thomas I

learnt how all evidence given before an examining magistrate comes to be uniform in style. He received me in his room whilst with the assistance of his clerk he was examining a witness. I was about to withdraw, but he begged me to remain, saying that my presence would in no way interfere with a proper administration of justice.

I sat down in a corner and listened to the questions and answers:

"Duval, did you see the accused at six o'clock in the evening?"

"That is to say, Monsieur le Juge, my wife was at the window. Then she said to me: 'There's Socquardot going by!' "

"His presence under your window must have struck her as remarkable since she took the trouble to mention it to you particularly. And did the gait of the accused arouse your suspicion?"

"I will tell you how it was, Monsieur le Juge. My wife said to me: 'There's Socquardot going by!' Then I looked and said 'Why yes, it's Socquardot!' "

"Precisely! Clerk, write down: At six o'clock in the evening, the couple Duval saw the accused loafing round the house and walking with a suspicious gait."

Monsieur Thomas put a few more questions to

the witness, who was a day labourer by occupation: he received replies and dictated to his clerk their translation into judge's jargon. Then the witness listened to the reading of his evidence, signed it, bowed and withdrew.

"Why," I asked, "do you not record the evidence as it is given you instead of translating it into words never used by the witness?"

Monsieur Thomas gazed at me with astonishment and replied calmly:

"I do not understand your meaning. I record the evidence as faithfully as possible. Every magistrate does. And in all the law reports there is not a single instance of evidence having been altered or distorted by a judge. If, in conformity with the invariable custom of my colleagues, I modify the exact terms used by the witnesses, it is because such witnesses as this Duval, whom you have just heard, express themselves badly, and it would be derogatory to the dignity of justice to record incorrect, low and frequently gross expressions when there is no point in doing so. But, my dear sir, I think you fail to realize the conditions of a judicial examination. You must bear in mind the object of the magistrate in recording and classifying evidence. It is not for his own enlightenment alone but for that of the tribunal. It is not enough for

him to see the case clearly, it must be equally clear to the minds of the judges. He has therefore to bring into prominence those charges which are sometimes concealed beneath the incoherent or diffuse story of a witness or confused by the ambiguous replies of the accused. If it were to be registered without order or method the most convicting evidence would lose its point and the majority of criminals would escape punishment."

"But surely," I asked, "a proceeding which consists in fixing the wandering thoughts of witnesses must be very dangerous."

"It would be if magistrates were not conscientious. But I never yet met a magistrate who was not deeply conscious of his duty. And yet I have sat on the Bench with Protestants, Deists and Jews. But they were magistrates."

"At least you must admit, Monsieur Thomas, that your method possesses one disadvantage: when you read the written account of his evidence to the witness, he can hardly understand it, since you have introduced into it terms he is not accustomed to employ and the sense of which escapes him. What does your expression 'suspicious gait' convey to the mind of this labourer?"

He replied eagerly:

"I have thought of that, and against this danger

I have taken the greatest precautions. I will give you an example. A short time ago a witness of a somewhat limited intelligence and of whose morals I was ignorant, appeared not to attend to the clerk's reading of the witness's evidence. I had it read a second time, having urged the deponent to give it his sustained attention. By what I could see he did nothing of the kind. Then in order to bring home to him a more correct appreciation of his duty and his responsibility I made use of a stratagem. I dictated to the clerk one final phrase which contradicted everything that had gone before. I asked the witness to sign. Then, just as he was putting pen to paper, I seized his arm. 'Wretch!' I cried, 'you are about to sign a declaration contrary to the one you have made and by so doing to commit a crime.' "

"Well! and what did he say to you?"

"He replied piteously: 'Monsieur le Juge, you are cleverer than I, you must know best what I ought to write.'

"You see," added Monsieur Thomas, "that a judge anxious to fulfil his function well can guard himself against any danger of making a mistake. Believe me, my dear sir, judicial error is a myth."

A SERVANT'S THEFT

TO HENRI MONOD

A SERVANT'S THEFT

BOUT ten years ago, perhaps more, perhaps less, I visited a prison for women. It was an old chateau built in the reign of Henry IV; and its high slate roofs frowned down upon a dark little southern town on the banks of a river. The governor of the prison had reached the age of superannuation. He wore a black wig and a white beard. He was an extraordinary governor. He had ideas of his own and kindly feelings. He had no illusions concerning the morals of his three hundred prisoners, but he did not consider them to be greatly inferior to the morals of any three hundred women collected haphazard in a town.

"Here as elsewhere we have all sorts and conditions," his gentle, tired glance seemed to say.

As we crossed the courtyard, a long string of prisoners was returning from a silent walk and going back to the workshops. Many of them were old and of hard, sullen aspect. My friend Dr. Cabane, who was with us, pointed out to me that nearly all these women had characteristic physical

defects, that squinting was not uncommon among them, that they were degenerates and that nearly all were marked with the stigma of crime or at least of misdemeanour.

The governor slowly shook his head. I saw that he was disinclined to admit the theories of criminologists. He was evidently still convinced that in our social groups the guilty do not greatly differ from the innocent.

He took us to the workshops. We saw the bakers, the laundresses and the needlewomen at their tasks. The atmosphere of work and neatness imparted almost a cheerful air to the place. The governor treated the women kindly. The most stupid and the most perverse failed to exhaust his patience and his benevolence. His opinion was that one should excuse many things in those with whom one lives and that one should not ask too much even from misdemeanants and criminals. Unlike most persons, he did not require thieves and procuresses to be perfect because they were being punished. He had little faith in the moral efficacy of punishment, and he despaired of making his prison a school of virtue. Being far from the belief that persons are rendered better by suffering, he spared these unfortunate women as much suffering as possible. I do not know whether he was religious, but

for him the idea of expiation had no moral significance.

"I give my own interpretation to the rules," he said, "before applying them. I myself explain them to the prisoners. For example, one rule is absolute silence. Now if they were to be absolutely silent they would become mad or imbecile. That such is the object of the rule I cannot think for one moment. I say to them: the rule commands you to keep silent. What does that mean? It means that the wardresses must not hear you speak. If you are heard you will be punished; if you are not heard you will incur no reproach. You have not to give me an account of your thoughts. If your words make no more sound than your thoughts then your words are no affair of mine. Thus admonished, they endeavour to speak without, if one may say so, uttering any sound. They are not driven mad and the rule is kept."

I inquired whether his superiors approved of his interpretation of prison rules. He replied that inspectors frequently reproached him, and that then he conducted them to the outer gate and said: "You see this railing; it is of wood. If you confined men here, in a week's time there would not be one left. The idea of escaping never occurs to women. But it is prudent not to make them fu-

rious. As it is, prison life conduces neither to physical nor to moral health. I resign my governorship if you subject them to the torture of silence."

The infirmary and the dormitories, which we visited next, were in great white-washed halls which retained nothing of their ancient splendour except monumental mantelpieces in grey stone and black marble surmounted by pompous Virtues in high relief. The figure of Justice, the work of some Italianate Flemish artist of about 1600, with bare neck and hip protruding through parted drapery, held suspended from one stout arm its unequally balanced scales, the plates of which clinked against each other like cymbals. This goddess seemed to menace with the point of her sword a little sickly form lying on an iron bedstead, upon which was a mattress as thin as a folded towel. It looked like a child.

"Well! And are you better?" asked Dr. Cabane.

"Oh! yes, sir, much better."

And she smiled.

"Come then, you must be good and you will get well."

She looked at the doctor with wide eyes full of joy and hope.

"This little girl has been very ill," said Dr. Cabane.

And we passed on.

"What was her offence?"

"It was no mere offence, it was a crime."

"Ah!"

"Infanticide."

At the end of a long corridor, we entered an almost cheerful little room, furnished with cupboards and with windows which, devoid of iron bars, looked on to the country. Here a very pretty young woman was writing at a desk. Standing near her another with a good figure was looking for a key in a bunch hanging from her waist. I might have taken them for the governor's daughters. He informed me that they were two prisoners.

"Did you not notice that they wear prisoner's dress?"

I had not noticed it, doubtless because they did not wear it like the others.

"Their dresses are better made and they wear smaller caps which show their hair."

"It is very difficult," replied the old governor, "to prevent a woman showing her hair when it is beautiful. These two are subject to the ordinary regulations and compelled to work."

"What are they doing?"

"One is keeper of the records and the other is librarian."

There was no need to ask: their offences were crimes of passion. The governor made no secret that he preferred criminals to misdemeanants.

"I know some criminals," he said, "who are as it were aloof from their crime. It was a flash in their life. They are capable of straightforwardness, courage and generosity. I could not say as much for my thieves. Their mediocre and commonplace wrongdoing is woven into the very tissue of their existence. They are incorrigible. And the baseness which was the cause of their misdemeanour reveals itself over and over again in their conduct. The penalty imposed on them is relatively light, and, as they have little sensibility either physical or moral, they generally bear it easily."

"But it does not follow," he added quickly, "that these unhappy creatures are unworthy of pity and do not deserve to have an interest taken in them. The longer I live the more clearly do I see that the so-called criminal is in reality merely unfortunate."

He took us into his room and told a warder to bring him prisoner 503.

"I am going to show you something," he said,

"which I entreat you to believe has not been arranged purposely for you; it will inspire you doubtless with some novel reflections on lawbreaking and its punishment. What you are about to see and hear I have seen and heard a hundred times in my life."

A prisoner accompanied by a wardress entered the room. She was a young peasant girl, rather pretty, sweet and simple looking.

"I have some good news for you," said the governor. "The President of the Republic, having been told of your good conduct, remits the remainder of your sentence. You will be liberated on Saturday."

She was listening with her mouth half open, her hands clasped below the waist. But she was not quick to grasp ideas.

"Next Saturday you will leave this place. You will be free."

This time she understood, her hands rose in a gesture of distress, her lips trembled.

"Is it true that I must go away? Then what will become of me? Here I was fed, clothed and everything. Could you not tell the good gentleman that it is better for me to stay where I am?"

Gently but firmly the governor showed her that she could not refuse the mercy shown her; then he

informed her that on her departure she would receive a certain sum, ten or twelve francs.

She went out weeping.

I inquired what she had done.

He turned over a register.

"503. She was servant in a farmhouse. . . . She stole a petticoat from her mistress. . . . A theft committed by a servant. . . . On such offences, you must know, the law is very severe."

EDMÉE, OR CHARITY WELL BESTOWED

TO H. HARDUIN

EDMÉE, OR CHARITY WELL BESTOWED

ORTEUR, the founder of *l'Etoile,* the political and literary editor of *La Revue Nationale* and of *Le Nouveau Siècle Illustré,* Horteur, having received me in his editorial room, from the depths of his editorial arm-chair addressed me thus:

"My good Martean, write me a story for the special number of *Le Nouveau Siècle.* Three hundred lines for New Year's Day. Something amusing with a high society atmosphere."

I told Horteur that that was not in my line, at least not in the sense in which he understood it, but that I was prepared to write him a story.

"I should like it to be entitled," he said, "a tale for the rich."

"I should prefer a tale for the poor."

"That is what I mean. A tale to inspire the rich with pity for the poor."

"But that is precisely what I object to. I do not want the rich to have pity on the poor."

"Curious!"

"No, it is not curious, but scientific. In my opinion the pity of the rich for the poor is an insult and a denial of human brotherhood. If you wish me to address the rich I shall say: 'Spare the poor your pity: they have no use for it. Wherefore pity and not justice? You have an account with them. Settle it. This is no question of sentiment. It is a matter of economics. If that which you are pleased to give them is calculated to prolong their poverty and your wealth, the gift is iniquitous and the tears you mingle with it will not render it just. "You must make restitution," as the attorney said to the judge after good Brother Maillard's sermon. You give alms in order to avoid making restitution. You give a little in order to keep much, and you gloat over it. For a like reason the tyrant of Samos threw his ring into the sea. But the Nemesis of the gods declined to receive the offering. A fisherman brought back the tyrant his ring in a fish's belly. And Polycrates was despoiled of all his wealth.' "

"You are joking."

"I am not joking. I want to make the rich understand that they are benevolent on the cheap, that their generosity costs them little, that they only make the creditor curl his lip, and that such is not

the way to conduct business. It is an opinion which may be of use to them."

"And these are the ideas you propose to express in *Le Nouveau Siècle* in order to increase the circulation! Not a bit of it my friend! Not a bit of it!"

"Why do you insist on the rich man assuming towards the poor an attitude different from that which he assumes towards the rich and powerful? He pays the rich what he owes them, and if he owe them nothing he pays them nothing. That is honest. If he be honest let him do the same for the poor. And do not say that the rich owe the poor nothing. I do not believe that a single rich man thinks so. It is upon the extent of the debt that opinions begin to differ. And no one is in a hurry to solve the problem. It is thought better to leave the matter vague. Every one is aware that he is in debt. But what he owes is uncertain, and so from time to time a little is paid on account. That is called philanthropy, and it is profitable."

"But, my dear fellow, there is no common sense in what you have been saying. Possibly I am more of a Socialist than you, but I am practical. To relieve suffering, to prolong a life, to redress some particle of social injustice is to attain a result. The little good one does is at any rate done. It

is not everything but it is something. If the story I ask you to write goes home to the hearts of a hundred of my rich subscribers and induces them to give it will be so much won from evil and suffering. Thus little by little the lot of the poor is rendered bearable."

"Is it good for the lot of the poor to be bearable? Poverty is indispensable to wealth and wealth to poverty. These two evils beget one another and foster one another. The condition of the poor does not need to be improved, but to be suppressed. I will not encourage the rich to give alms, because their alms are poisoned, because their alms do good to the giver and harm to the receiver, because in short, wealth being itself hard and cruel it must not put on the deceitful appearance of kindness. Since you wish me to write a story for the rich, I will say to them: 'Your poor are your dogs whom you feed in order that they may bite. Your bedesmen become the hounds of the propertied classes who bay at the proletariat. The rich give only to those who ask. The workers ask nothing, and they receive nothing.'"

"But the infirm, the aged and the orphaned? . . ."

"They have the right to live. For them I would not excite pity, I would appeal to justice."

"All this is mere theorizing! To return to reality, you will write me a New Year's Story, and you may introduce a suggestion of Socialism. Socialism is quite fashionable. It is even distinction. Of course I am not referring to the Socialism of Guesde or of Jaurès, but to a moderate Socialism such as men of the world intelligently and rightly oppose to collectivism. Have some young faces in your story. It will be illustrated and readers like pictures to be pleasing. Bring a young girl on the scene, a charming young girl. It will not be difficult."

"No, it is not difficult."

"Could you not introduce a little chimney-sweep? I have an illustration ready, a coloured engraving, which represents a young girl giving alms to a little chimney-sweep on the steps of the Madeleine. This would be an opportunity for using it. . . . It is cold, the snow is falling: the pretty girl is dropping a coin into the chimney-sweep's hand. Can you see it?"

"I see it."

"You will develop that theme."

"I will develop it. The little sweep, in a transport of gratitude throws his arms round the girl's neck. She happens to be the daughter of the Comte de Linotte. He gives her a kiss, imprinting on the

charming child's cheek a little round O of soot. A perfectly enchanting little O, quite round and quite black. He loves her. Edmée (her name is Edmée) is not indifferent to so sincere and ingenuous an attachment. . . . I fancy the idea is sufficiently pathetic."

"Yes. You will be able to make something of it."

"You encourage me to continue. On her return to her sumptuous home in the Boulevard Malesherbes, for the first time in her life Edmée is reluctant to wash her face: she would like to preserve the imprint of those lips on her cheek. Meanwhile the little sweep has followed her to her door. Rapt in ecstasy he stands beneath the adorable young girl's window. . . . Will that do?"

"Why, yes!"

"I continue. The next morning, lying on her little white bed, Edmée sees the little sweep coming down the chimney. Without any ado he throws himself on the charming child and covers her with little round O's of soot. I omitted to tell you that he is extremely handsome. While thus delightfully occupied he is surprised by the Comtesse de Linotte. She screams, she calls for help. But so absorbed is he that he neither sees nor hears."

"My dear Marteau. . . ."

"So absorbed is he that he neither sees nor hears. The Comte hastens into the room. He has the soul of a true aristocrat. He takes up the little sweep by the seat of his breeches . . . and throws him out of the window——"

"My dear Marteau. . . ."

"I hasten to conclude. . . . Nine months later the little sweep married the high-born maiden. And it was high time too. Such was the result of charity well bestowed."

"My dear Marteau, you have amused yourself long enough at my expense."

"Not a bit of it. I must finish. Having married Mademoiselle de Linotte, the little sweep became a papal count and was ruined on the Turf. To-day he is a stove dealer at Montparnasse in the Rue de la Gaîté. His wife keeps his shop and sells stoves at eighteen francs apiece payable in eight months."

"My dear Marteau it isn't the least bit funny."

"Beware, my dear Horteur. What I have just told you is really Lamartine's *Chute d'un Ange* and Alfred de Vigny's *Eloa.* And, taking it all round, it is better than your tearful tales, which make folk believe that they are very kind when they are not kind at all, that they do good when they do nothing of the sort, that it is easy for them to be benevolent when it is the most difficult thing in the world. My

story is moral. Moreover it is optimistic and ends well. For, in her shop in the Rue de la Gaîté, Edmée found the happiness which in amusements and festivities she would have sought in vain, had she been married to a diplomat or an officer. . . . My dear editor, are we agreed: Will you have *Edmée, or Charity well Bestowed* for the *Nouveau Siècle Illustré?*"

"You ask me that in all seriousness? . . ."

"In all seriousness I ask you. If you will not have my story, I will publish it elsewhere."

"Where?"

"In some high class journal."

"I dare you to do so."

"You will see."

The *Figaro,* under the editorship of Monsieur de Rodays, published *Edmée ou La Charité bein placée.* It was, so to speak, offered as a New Year's gift to the readers of that paper.

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